

FLOYD COIT

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 106.

NEW YORK, JUNE 13, 1900.

Price 5 Cents.



"Jump!" again cried Bolton. He took a flying leap, the crack then being about four feet in width, being followed upon the instant by Hervey. The gap instantly widened, and as Dick and Ralph flew over it was more than six feet across.

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Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, November 7, 1898. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1900, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 106.

NEW YORK, June 13, 1900.

Price 5 Cents.

IN THE ICE.

A Story of the Arctic Regions.

FLOYD COIT
N Y SOUTH OTSELIC

By HOWARD AUSTIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROPOSED EXPEDITION—THE START—A TRAITOR.

"I tell you it cannot be done."

"And I tell you it can."

"Others have tried it and failed."

"Others have succeeded in many things where those before them have failed."

"But not in this."

"That does not deter me. The thing will be accomplished some day, and why should I not do it as well as anyone else?"

"I grant you that you might succeed—nay, that you would do so in anything else, but——"

"But what?"

"Neither you nor anyone else can accomplish impossibilities."

"There you go again, Davy. How do you know it is impossible?"

"How do I know anything? From the evidence of my senses, of course; and I tell you, Harry Hudson, that you'll fly before you discover the North Pole."

"At all events I am going to try."

"Government won't help you; they're tired of that at Washington."

"I don't want them to help me. I've got my own vessel, the Hope, just the right sort for the work, and I've plenty of friends ready to see me through—you for one."

"I'll see you to—— What! I for one! What do you mean?"

"That we must have a surgeon, Davy, and that you're the very man for the position."

"I? Nonsense! Do you think I've taken leave of my senses?"

"Rawlins is going as first mate, and Ransom as second; do you know of any better ice master than Bolton?"

"He was with Hazen in the Pole Star, and is as good a man

as you'll find. Well, you've got veterans, I see. A burned child may dread the fire, but it's very clear that a man who has been frozen in the Polar Circle is ready to go again just as soon as he thaws out."

"Dick is going with me, too."

"H'm! He's as crazy as you are on the subject. What route are you going to take?"

"Through Behring's Strait."

"H'm! You've got some sense left! That route is the most feasible that has yet been talked of, in my opinion, and you've got good men to assist you. I know you well enough, but I didn't think you'd pick up as good men as you have."

"I'm sorry about my surgeon; I'm afraid I'll have to take Mott."

"What? Take that quack? By Jove, I'd go myself before I'd see an old friend of mine under his hands. He'd bleed you when you wanted a tonic, and stuff you when you had a low fever. He don't know as much about medicine as a cat, for she can doctor herself."

"He is accounted a very good——"

"Oh, pshaw! Oh, I say, Harry, you'd never think of taking—Oh, come now, be reasonable! Confound it, man, you shan't take him! I'll go myself!"

"Done! Consider yourself surgeon of the exploring steamer Hope, bound for the North Pole. Ha, Davy, my boy, I knew I'd trap you!"

The above conversation took place between two old friends—Captain Henry Hudson, formerly a captain in the United States Navy, but for some years resigned, and Dr. Davids, an army surgeon, who had been in active service for many years, and was as efficient as he was eccentric.

Captain Hudson had purchased a little steamer which he had renamed the Hope, and which he had fitted up for an expedition to the North Pole, the discovering of which had long been a cherished project with him.

He knew that the worthy doctor would object, and he had

cleverly trapped him into giving his word to go with the expedition, and knew that the man would sooner cut off his own head than violate it.

The argument had taken place over a bottle of wine in Captain Hudson's cozy dining-room, his son Dick having retired, at a signal from his father, the young fellow knowing well the subject to be broached.

Dick Hudson was nineteen, tall, strong and hearty for his years, possessing an iron constitution, and a will to do and to dare anything that was not impossible; but like his father, that word impossible, in his mind, embraced but a small field.

He was to accompany the expedition, for, since his mother's death, he and his father were inseparable, and went into various projects more like brothers than like father and son.

Captain Hudson was possessed of an independent fortune, and could therefore well afford the expense of an expedition of this kind, depending entirely upon himself, and thereby avoiding the many disappointments and delays which usually attend the waiting upon Congress or Royalty to push ahead anything that they have agreed to foster.

The Hope lay at a private dock on the North River, in the city of New York, and was to start for San Francisco in a week, and after refitting, recoaling, and taking on a few extra hands at the latter port, would proceed at once upon her voyage.

As the time for her sailing drew near, the greatest excitement prevailed, and the newspapers and public prints were full of the affair, enough officers and seamen having offered their services as would have filled two more vessels of the same size, and everybody seeming to have no other topic of conversation.

In the best room of a sailors' boarding house on the west side of the city, a night or two before the Hope was to sail, sat a sea-faring man, of not over prepossessing appearance, although he seemed possessed of health, strength, good vision, sound, whole limbs and an agreeable disposition—that is, if the latter could be judged from his general conversation.

He wore a mustache only, and his hair was short, crisp, and curly, and considerably streaked with gray, although he could not be more than forty years old at the most.

He had an ugly scar on his left cheek, and men often wondered that he did not allow his beard to grow so as to cover it, instead of leaving his face smooth; but probably he had his own reasons for so doing.

"Let me see," the man muttered to himself, when alone, glancing at the newspaper he held in his hand. "The Hope sails on Thursday for San Francisco, and I go to Charleston to-morrow as mate of the Kite. Can I get back in time?"

"Say two months and a half, and then another to refit at 'Frisco; that'll be about right. If she leaves on the first of June it will give me time enough, and she won't be likely to leave before that time, I don't fancy, for then the ice would be in her way.

"I'll have more money if I make this trip, and I'll be doing something instead of loafing about here. It isn't likely that I'll do any better by going straight to 'Frisco and waiting for her; and, besides, I haven't the money. No; I'll wait, go overland by rail, and be there in time to get a position aboard of her. Leave that to me. Ha! Captain Hudson, I have not forgotten you, nor your son Dick, either, and I intend to avenge myself on you both!"

It happened, therefore, that this man, who was called Hervey, set sail the next day for Charleston on the Kite, and that the day after the Hope steamed out of the bay bound around Cape Horn for San Francisco.

Three months later, a man called Hervey, but wearing a full black beard, and with short, crisp black locks and mustache, in which there was not a single trace of gray, applied to Captain Hudson for a position on board the Hope, having had experience in the North, he said.

Now it happened that the boatswain had gone ashore the day before, got in a fight with some Chinamen, having maliciously provoked them to a quarrel, it is said, and had been killed, or at all events he did not turn up, although a thorough search was made for him.

The Hope was ready to sail in a few days, and the applicant was evidently a good man, as well as a thorough seaman, as a brief examination showed, and such men were scarce.

He seemed strong and well built, and evidently in the best of health, the doctor making a thorough examination of him, and pronouncing him perfectly sound and well fitted for an Arctic voyage.

"You've had your hair dyed, my man," grunted the doctor, when he had finished, "though I don't know as that makes any difference in your physical condition."

"That's only a matter of taste, sir," was the answer. "I was a trifle gray, I'll admit; but my woman, the one I'm sparking, likes black hair, so I just died it to please her."

"H'm! it's always the women that put men up to be vain," sputtered the doctor, "and to do worse things than dyeing their hair, too, I suspect, sometimes. Well, I never ran after one yet, and I don't intend to. Well, my man, if you must dye your hair, always use vegetable dyes, such as you have used this time. Anything else looks bad, and, besides that, injures your health. You'll pass, if the captain wants you."

"He's too observant, the old fool!" muttered Hervey, when alone. "I'm on my guard now, though, and it isn't likely that Hudson will suspect anything. He must have forgotten me by this time."

Hervey was engaged to take the place of the boatswain, and was rated on the Hope's books the next day.

"You say your name is Hervey?" asked the captain, as he met the man on deck. "I fancied I had seen you before somewhere."

"Hardly likely, sir," was the answer. "I am an Englishman, and haven't been in the country over a month."

"You have no accent; I should not take you for an Englishman."

"I'm not a Londoner, sir, and therefore can speak English so as to be understood. I have resided in the Sandwich Islands for some years back, and there are many Americans there, you know."

"It was merely a fancy," returned the commander. "I see now that I was mistaken."

Young Dick chanced to be passing at that moment, and giving the man a passing glance went on.

"I'm safe enough," thought Hervey, "for the youngster does not know me, and it's unlikely that the old man will think any more about it. If the young one don't call his attention to it, I know he won't."

For all that the man kept out of sight of both Dick and the captain as far as possible, although never appearing to avoid them.

In three or four days the Hope departed, intending to stop at a point on the upper coast of Alaska for coal and fur garments, after which they would proceed without further delay for the frozen regions of the North.

The Hope was a fast vessel, and had already proved herself seaworthy in her voyage around the Cape, so that much was expected of her, and she fully realized these expectations, fortunately meeting with no delay in coaling, and passing through Behring's Strait on the Fourth of July, the day being doubly celebrated in consequence.

In a few days they began to meet with considerable drift ice, but the lanes or leads through them could always be passed without difficulty, and no fears were apprehended concerning the safety of the vessel.

Much of the time they had fair winds, and could therefore

rely mainly on their sails, thus saving the consumption of coal, a most important consideration.

"Everything balks me as yet," muttered Hervey, one night, as he stood leaning over the rail. "Good weather, no ice to speak of, the men all in good humor and contented, the captain distant and reserved, young Dick always in company of that chum of his. Well, I can wait, and when the time does come for revenge, it will be all the sweeter for having waited."

CHAPTER II.

SOME QUEER CUSTOMERS—THE TRAITOR BEGINS HIS WORK.

Hervey has spoken about a chum of Dick's, and it is high time that I introduced him.

Ralph Sargent was a young fellow of Dick's own age, the son of a sea captain, who wished that his boy should follow the same honorable calling as himself, and knew of no better man to intrust him to than his old friend Hudson.

Sargent had amassed a fortune, but Ralph was told that he must make his own way in the world until he know the value of money, and that when he became fit to command, he should have a vessel of his own.

Ralph, therefore, although rated as a seaman on the Hope, and receiving seaman's wages, occupied a berth in Dick's room, and lived in the cabin, studying navigation and the routine of sea life, so as to be able to ultimately take charge of a vessel of his own.

He and Dick had been firm friends ever since they had worn trousers, and Captain Hudson had also conceived a strong liking for the young fellow, as well on his own account as on his father's, and was ready and willing to give him all the assistance and advice that lay in his power.

As I shall have considerable to say about certain of the seamen on board the Hope, some of whom were characters, in their way, I cannot do better than describe them also, in this connection, and then leave them to take care of themselves.

Topp, the cook, was a tall, lanky, ungainly-looking fellow, as thin as a match and with a half-starved appearance, as though he never had enough to eat, which was the contrary, however, as he was a most inordinate feeder, although the heat of the galley and the smell of the savory odors which issued therefrom did not seem to put any extra flesh on his big bones.

Cleat, the carpenter, was the opposite of Topp in appearance, being short, fat and rosy, with as merry a disposition as Topp's was sour and crabbed, having a joke or a laugh for every occasion, and being particularly fond of playing off pranks on the grim-visaged cook.

Topp considered that he was the most veracious person in the world, and that when he said anything there could be no disputing it although some of his assertions had about as much truth in them as the yarns of that extraordinary historian Gulliver, or the equally truthful Munchausen.

"Why, I tell ye I can't tell a lie," he would say, laying one huge paw—you could not call it a hand—upon the other, and making a resounding noise therewith. "I can't; it's an impossible thing. I was brought up to tell the truth, and it's out of reason to expect me to do anything else."

This oft-repeated statement was made one afternoon shortly after the steamer had passed through the Straits to a little coterie of his companions, who sat around the galley door, among them Cleat, the carpenter.

"Why, you old sea lawyer," cried he, with a grin, "do you mean to tell me that you have yourself been to the North Pole many and many's the time?"

"Didn't I say so? Well, that settles it. I can't tell a lie."

"What was the name of the last vessel you were in when you went there?"

"The Breeze, Captain Jack Templeton."

"H'm! that vessel was lost twenty years ago, and no trace ever seen or heard of her, or any one aboard of her. Besides, she went South."

"What of it? I can't tell a lie, I tell ye. If you keep on going south you'll strike north after awhile, won't ye? and then by still keeping on, go south again?"

"And do you mean to tell me that you went around the world end for end, taking in both the North and South Poles? Why, here's a natural curiosity, mates—the biggest liar on record."

"I can't help your inferences," growled Topp, getting red in the face. "I can't tell a lie, and that's the end on't."

"Well, it's mighty plain to be seen that liars ain't struck dead in these days, or you'd have gone to glory or elsewhere long ago."

This made Topp mad, and he sprang for the jolly carpenter with the most unexpected result.

The jolly fellow had, during the course of the argument, fastened a lot of tin saucepans by a bit of rope yarn to Topp's apron strings, and when the irate cook jumped up they went flying out behind him like the tail of a comet.

Cleat dodged; and, as Topp turned, his clattering appendages swung around, scattering the spectators like chaff.

Jack Bunt got a crack in the stomach with his dipper, a quart pot full of slush took John Bilge in the mouth, the blackened bottom of a big saucepan left its mark on Jerry Hull's flat nose, while a huge coffeepot played a regular jig on Tom Reefer's shins, not to mention sundry other mishaps.

Everybody was in a roar, and at last Topp slipped and sat down in a tin steamer used for cooking potatoes, and stuck so fast that he had to be lifted out, during which time Cleat slipped off to his workbench, leaving Topp to get all the blame for the disturbance.

"That beats the sight of a dog running about with a tin kettle tied to his tail," laughed Dick, who had seen the sport.

"Why, Topp had a regular tin shop fastened to his rear."

"Looking like a flying machine broke loose," added Ralph. "I'll bet he'll vow vengeance on Cleat for that, and what he says he'll stick to, for he can't tell a lie, you know."

As the Hope proceeded she was careful to avoid the pack ice, which if it had once caught her might not have released her until, crushed and broken, she sought a grave in the depths of the cruel ocean.

Therefore the greatest care was taken that she should only enter such leads as were perfectly safe and open, and to avoid the main body of the floe ice which drifted by them.

It happened one night, about the first of August, the masses of ice seen during the day having greatly increased, that Hervey was on deck keeping a sharp lookout ahead, and now and then muttering to himself.

The man at the wheel was a man much addicted to sleeping at his post, this habit having been increased of late by a sly dose which Hervey had put into his coffee, with which he was wont to regale himself just before beginning his duties.

What Hervey put into it was something to make him sleep, and it was not strange, therefore, that, after having been at his post half an hour, he began to nod and yawn, and lean against the wheel for support, holding on by the spokes.

It was late, and the men on deck were sitting well up forward, under the lee of the rail, to keep out of the wind, the officer of the watch sitting just under the rise of the quarter-deck, close by the companion ladder, smoking a cigar.

There was no particular danger just then, as the vessel was running through a long, straight lane of water, the ice being at least thirty feet away on either side.

Further on, however, this lane branched off into two, one being perfectly safe, the other leading into the pack ice, and

this Hervey had seen as he stood looking over the rail aft, out of sight of the officer.

The man had planned for an occasion like this, and he now began to carry out his evil intentions.

He noiselessly approached the binnacle, holding something heavy in his hand, and this he deposited beneath it without having alarmed the dozing helmsman.

What he had put down was a piece of iron.

Its effect on the needle of the compass was directly apparent.

It was at once considerably deflected from its true course.

As he was stealing away, the villain contrived to make some little noise, unnoticed by the officer of the watch.

The helmsman heard it, however, and instantly awoke.

Glancing at the compass, he saw that the vessel was apparently off her course.

At that moment she had reached the point where the lane divided.

The man instantly righted his wheel and the vessel went off a couple of points, after which he kept her on a straight course.

On that one false step depended all the fatalities which afterward surrounded the vessel.

By changing her course she had been turned into the false lead, and beyond her lay the pack ice.

For some time, however, the change would not be noticed.

Hervey smiled as he looked out over the glittering expanse lit by the moon, and murmured to himself:

"If I mistake not, we shall be beset before long, and then if Captain Hudson saves his vessel he will be smarter than I think he is."

An hour later, just before the watch was to be relieved, the officer looked up and glanced across the waters.

The moon was now obscured, but, nevertheless, the look of things did not please him.

"Who's at the wheel?" he asked, rising and ascending to the quarter-deck.

"I am, sir—Bilge," answered the man, suddenly arousing himself in time to prevent discovery.

"What course have you got?"

"The same I had when I took the wheel, sir—about nothe-east, sir."

"It doesn't seem as if we're following the same lead as before. This is narrower, and there is more ice ahead of us. Why didn't you report the change?"

"I didn't notice none, sir. I've been keeping on as straight as a string all the time, and kept the same lead; that was all I was expected to do, sir."

"I am not blaming you, my man, and I presume it is all right. I don't know as much about these things as I might, and I presume I alarm myself without cause."

Just then the watches were changed, and in the confusion Hervey contrived to take away the iron and hide it from sight, the relief helmsman being told to keep the vessel as she was.

The sky had been growing obscured for some little time, and now one of those sudden snow squalls, which are so common in the Arctic, came up, and it was impossible to see to the end of the bowsprit.

The ice pilot, Mr. Bolton, came on deck in this watch for a few moments; but as he could see nothing whatever, he, of course, did not see the dangers which surrounded him.

Thus matters went on till morning, when Captain Hudson came on deck, accompanied by Dick and his chum.

"What a lot of ice!" cried Dick.

"There is certainly more than there should be," observed his father, "and it seems to be pressing in upon us."

As he spoke the vessel was suddenly caught between two immense floe pieces and held fast.

A shock ran through her, and she keeled slightly to port.

Bolton came running on deck, and took in the situation at a glance.

Not a word did he speak, however.

A deep shade of vexation settled on his face which spoke louder than words.

"What is the matter, Mr. Bolton?" asked Dick.

"We are in the ice!"

"That does not necessarily endanger us?" asked the captain.

"Not if we can get out. But look behind you."

Behind the ice had closed in upon them, and presented an unbroken expanse as far as the eye could reach.

Before them it was the same.

The vessel moved, it is true, but not of her own will.

She was drifting with the floe ice.

"Come, come, Bolton," said the captain, cheerily, "this is nothing. I have been caught in the ice before, and got out. We shall drift awhile, and then the wind will make a sudden change and free us, or we can batter our way out."

"We might if we had any room to run in; but, look at us! We are caught as if in a vise, surrounded by pack ice. Well, well. I'll do my best to get us out of the scrape; but how we got in is a mystery to me. We must have gone astray during the night, for the lead we were following could not have got us into this plight."

"He knows too much," thought Hervey, upon hearing these words. "He must be silenced!"

CHAPTER III.

A TRIP OVER THE ICE—FAST IN THE FLOE.

That forenoon a party was sent out over the ice, in charge of Bolton, to see if there was any passage beyond to which the vessel might be forced.

The party consisted of Bolton, Hervey, Dick and Ralph, and two seamen, Bunt and Bowline, all dressed in furs, and carrying axes and gus, in case they should chance to meet any bears or seals.

They proceeded in a straight line for some distance, keeping the vessel in sight, and making their way without difficulty over the hummocks caused by the floes running under each other and forcing the upper pieces upon their edges.

Bolton went ahead, the two boys following Hervey walking by himself, and the two sailors bringing up the rear.

They went on thus for a good while, when they encountered a small pond of water, fifty feet long by about twelve wide, extending in the direction they were going.

They skirted it on the side nearest the ship, and presently they reached a mass of ice considerably higher than the surrounding surface, evidently a small berg which had been forced into the floe and was carried along with it.

From this elevation they could see nothing which could give them any encouragement, and Bolton proposed that they should return, as the wind was beginning to blow up pretty fresh, and the air was growing decidedly cold.

As they passed the pond they had skirted on their way out, they noticed that young ice was beginning to form, the surface of the water being already nearly covered by a thin coating of ice.

"That's bad," remarked Bolton, "for I fear the ice will form under the vessel, and force us higher up, holding us all the faster."

Had anyone seen Hervey's face at that moment he would have seen a cruel smile flit across it; but no one did, and the man's evil purpose was still known only to himself.

Fiercer blew the wind, and now ominous sounds began to be heard, which could only cause the greatest alarm.

Now and then a noise like the report of a cannon could be heard, and a strange commotion seemed to be going on under their feet.

"Take care," said Bolton, coolly; "the ice is liable to open directly under your feet."

The reports continued, accompanied by a strange rumbling, and more than once the ice trembled so beneath their feet that it seemed as though it were about to upheave and cast them into the icy waters.

"Look!" cried Dick presently.

There had been a louder report than usual, together with more commotion in the ice, and as the lad spoke several open spaces were seen in the ice ahead of them.

"Hurry!" cried Bolton, "or we shall be cut off!"

All hands ran ahead as fast as was possible, for the vessel was still half a mile ahead of them, and no one knew what might happen the next moment.

Fortunately the newly-formed ponds did not lie in their way, and they hastened on, not knowing when a yawning chasm might open under their very feet.

The ice seemed to tremble under them, and they made the most of their time, each trying to encourage the others to renewed exertions.

They had got to within a quarter of a mile of the Hope, when Dick suddenly uttered a cry and sprang back.

The ice began to part, forming a crack right across their path, extending a considerable distance on either side, and threatening to cut them off from the vessel.

"Jump!" yelled Bolton. "Jump for your lives!"

The crack certainly would not close, and the probability was that it would widen, and perhaps extend in other directions, isolating them entirely from the road of escape.

"Jump!" again cried Bolton.

He took a flying leap, the crack being then about four feet in width, being followed upon the instant by Hervey.

The gap instantly widened, and as Dick and Ralph flew over it was more than six feet across.

Bunt was the next man over, having to clear ten feet of water, and narrowly missing a ducking in the icy flood.

Bowline was the last man, having lingered behind, and he now came running up, his face white with terror.

Just before he reached the edge the ice began to upheave in a terrible manner, his companions hurrying on in order that they might reach the vessel before being cut off.

The poor fellow paused, and a look of dismay came over his face.

There was a gap of fifteen feet between him and the ice beyond, widening every second.

He ran up and down, hoping to find a place to leap across; but now the water began to break through in other directions, and the poor fellow suddenly found himself cut off.

He was afloat on a cake of ice twenty feet long and ten wide, over which the waves would every now and then break, threatening to wash him off.

"I only wish that young Dick had got caught that way," muttered Hervey. "I've nothing against this fellow."

Those that had escaped were now flying over the ice, the vessel in plain sight, and not yet liberated from her glittering fetters.

Dick hated to leave poor Bowline, but there was danger that they would all lose their lives if they remained behind.

Once they reached the Hope they might be able to save him by means of a boat, and they therefore pushed on all the faster.

Once, as they were within a hundred feet of the vessel, the ice parted right in front of them, but they all went flying over the chasm at once, and in a few moments more reached the

side and clambered on board by means of ladders let down to them.

"Bowline is out there on the ice," said Bolton; "but unless the ice in front of us opens, I do not see how we can get a boat out to him."

As he spoke, however, there was a sudden noise like thunder, the vessel was lifted bodily out of the bonds that held it, and then driven forward with great force.

Every soul on board was thrown down, and many thought that their last hour had come.

The vessel floated free of the ice, however, a large opening having suddenly been made through which she could be guided, the glittering masses drifting by her slowly.

"Get on all steam!" cried Bolton, "and we will try and force our way through the pack ahead of us, to the next lead."

Steam was already up, and it was only necessary to get on a full head, which could be done in a short time.

Then the brave little vessel went at the ice full tilt, and with her sharp steel spur at the bow soon cut her way into the ice which lay in her way some few lengths ahead.

It parted and left under the attack, and the Hope presently reached a newly-made lane extending for some distance.

In this, floating on a cake of ice, was Bowline, and a boat was speedily lowered and sent to his rescue.

Dick was in command of the boat, and Hervey wished that all sorts of calamities might happen to it, so that the young fellow might not return.

Bowline was rescued, however, and a happier man than he, when he once more trod the deck of the Hope, could not well be imagined.

The vessel was not out of difficulty yet, however, for the same wind which had caused the breaking up of the ice, now packed it together closer than before.

The floe pieces pressed against the sides of the vessel, and seemed ready to crush her in their sharp embrace.

She was suddenly lifted up and heeled over to starboard, a huge mass of ice sliding right under her and holding her as in a cradle.

She remained stationary, the floe holding her fast, the hummocks of ice closing in upon her, keeping her in a firm grasp though not crushing her.

She was in the ice, indeed, and her voyage, which had opened so auspiciously, received a sudden and most annoying delay, which might last, no one knew how long.

They were resting upon the floe, not between two pieces, and in that fashion might drift for months, perhaps years; though as yet hope had not left them, and they had no means of foreseeing the dreadful future.

"H'm!" thought Hervey, as he saw with ill-concealed pleasure what had befallen them, "it could not have been done better. Now for the long winter in the ice, and we will see if we do not break the proud spirit of this tyrant. Leave me alone now to work out my revenge, and dearly repay on his and his son's heads the wrongs I have suffered at his hands."

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARING FOR WINTER—THE ACCIDENT.

The middle of September arrived, and the Hope was still in the ice.

She still rested on the floe piece, the keel being deeply imbedded in it, her hull still listing to starboard.

The only change that had taken place was in her drift, the ice moving slowly to the eastward, but never breaking up.

Winter was now beginning in earnest, and as the weather

began to grow colder preparations were made for making them secure against the cold.

The house on deck was supplied with extra stoves, all the doors but one being closed, the walls lined with heavy sail cloth, and snow packed up all around upon the outside, thus preventing the slightest breath of cold air from penetrating the seams, the bitter wind of these desolate regions being most searching.

The Hope was caught in a sort of cradle in the floe piece, and was thus slowly carried along, the ice flowing beneath it at a rapid rate, although that on the surface proceeded more slowly.

The drift still continued, and although there could still be seen an occasional lead or lane of water in the distance, there was no chance of reaching them.

Had the Hope been merely frozen into the ice in some creek or cove, beyond the influence of the pack, there would have been nothing to fear, but now she formed part of the pack itself, and ran great risk of being nipped or crushed by the ice all around her.

The fact of her being perched upon one of the floe pieces, instead of being caught between two separate ones, was a matter of congratulation, and the captain and crew could not fail to be grateful for the circumstances.

Day after day passed on, week after week slipped by, the Hope still drifting slowly to the eastward, locked fast in the ice, from which there seemed to be no relief, and which, for all they knew, might prove the grave of the entire expedition.

The day grew shorter as the time sped on, and before many weeks the sun would sink out of sight not to reappear for at least three months.

Hervey bided his time, doing nothing to excite suspicion, but nevertheless maintaining a careful watch over both Captain Hudson and his son Dick.

The man had come into these desolate regions for purposes of vengeance, but he had waited patiently so far, and could wait longer if need be; his revenge would be all the sweeter for his having waited so long.

Dick and Ralph were constantly together, and although the latter did not seem to mistrust him, Hervey was always most circumspect in his conduct, and did not attempt any treachery toward the young man as yet.

"I can wait," he would say to himself. "A wrong like mine cannot be hastily avenged; time will make my reprisal all the more terrible. My opportunity will come, if I only wait, and then let this tyrant and his son beware of my wrath."

As there was really so little to do, there was danger of the crew becoming discontented, and Captain Hudson therefore laid down a set of rules to be followed, so as to prevent this.

Every day the men arose at such an hour, went through a short drill, and had breakfast, after which the hold was broken out for stores, the men had two hours' exercise on the ice and returned to dinner, the afternoon being spent in reading and study, with a short run on the ice until supper, and in the evening games and other recreations were indulged in until bedtime.

There were fire drills, boat drills, and other useful practice at stated periods, and once a week there was a lecture upon interesting topics, particularly those concerning an expedition of this kind, in the cabin, besides a minstrel entertainment or concert every two weeks, in which the sailors took part, and to which the commander and officers received special invitations.

Thus the life on board the Hope went on tranquilly, all being apparently contented, no one becoming sick nor despondent, and all being hopeful for the future.

The light faded away at last, and the long Arctic night came on, relieved only by the occasional and fitful gleam of the aurora.

The sky was dark and gloomy; the ice wedged in more firmly

than ever, the snow covering all things with a thick mantle of white, the cold becoming more intensely bitter every day, and the vessel remaining immovable in the ice, the drift of which was now only perceived by means of the instruments.

Christmas was approaching, and all hands agreed to celebrate it most royally, for their hearts were not yet cast down by the dangers which beset them, nor by the doubts and fears which were, later on, to assail them so terribly.

The day before Christmas, the air being still quite cold, although there was no wind, the absence of which made the walking agreeable enough, Dick, Ralph, Hervey, Topp, the cook, and two Esquimaux, started out for a tramp across the ice.

The two Innuits, having the most unpronounceable names imaginable, had been rechristened by the sailors, Snooks and Brooks, but as they answered equally well to these names as to their own, the change was a decidedly agreeable one.

"Talking of long names," muttered Topp, as they set out, each carrying a steel-pointed stick to assist him in walking, besides a rifle thrown over the shoulder, "talking of long names, I say, reminds me of a feller I knowed once, on a trip just like this.

"We had one of these natives with us, what had a name half a yard long, and meant Man-Who-Lives-Under-the-Ice-and-Eats-Raw-Blubber, but in its own language was a terror, and would break the jaw of a Dutchman to say.

"Well, one of our fellows, by practicing half an hour, morning and night, for three weeks, got so he could say it, and one day, when the cold was away down, two or three hundred below zero, or something like that, with the wind a-blowing a thousand miles an hour, he goes up on deck and hollers to this feller to come in to his breakfast.

"Well, sir, he rattled off the whole of that critter's name good enough, but then he stopped, with his mouth wide open, and couldn't say another word nor shut his jaw to save his neck.

"We thought it had given him the lockjaw to say it, but it wasn't that at all; it was keeping his mouth open so long that his throat was frozen stiff, and the wind rushing into his mouth—he had one like a tunnel or a barn door—he was one solid chunk of ice in two minutes.

"We lowered him into the hold with a block and tackle, and laid him on the stove to thaw out, and it was a good three hours afore he came around; he was so cold he put the fire out twice.

"We fetched him out of it at last, but would ye believe it, all the spunk was gone out of him, and he didn't care to show off no more, but ever after that, when he wanted to call that native, he jest called him Jim, which was short, sharp, and to the p'int, and didn't take half a second to say."

"I suppose you'll vouch for the truth of that yarn, won't you?" asked Ralph, with a laugh.

"Truth?" returned Topp, innocently. "Why, of course. I can't tell a lie, you know, and what I says, I sticks to."

The party had, during the recital of this veracious narrative, continued on its way over the ice at an easy gait, and soon after its conclusion reached a point where the hummocks of ice obliged them to make a detour.

Presently they struck a smooth, but winding path, which led in and out among the blocks, some of them reaching to a height of fifteen or twenty feet above their heads.

Dick and Ralph were in advance, and suddenly came upon an arched opening in a huge mass of ice, which seemed to run in to a considerable distance.

Over the central portion of this door, or archway, was poised a large block of ice like a keystone, and both boys remarked it.

Being curious to examine the grotto and determine whether it had been constructed by the hand of man, or was the work

of nature alone, they passed through the entrance, and stood in a vaulted chamber some twelve feet in height at the sides, and eighteen or twenty in the centre.

The place had evidently been formed by the alternate melting and packing of the ice, and was like a glittering palace of fairyland, all the colors of the rainbow being reflected from the polished columns that supported the roof.

As they stood gazing in rapt admiration at the beauties of this singular place, a loud crashing sound was heard behind them.

They turned instinctively toward the entrance, and found that it was closed.

The slab of ice over the archway had, in some unaccountable way, fallen in and completely blocked the outside world.

Was this the result of accident?

No; for a sharp blow with the steel point of Hervey's staff had caused the support of the overhanging block to give way and most effectually close the passage.

No one but Hervey had seen them enter the place; no one had seen his act, and now no one but he knew what had happened, or what their fate was likely to be.

CHAPTER V.

SHUT UP IN THE ICE—THE BEAR.

Neither Topp nor the two Esquimaux knew what had happened, but, supposing the two boys to be still in advance, followed on after Hervey, passing around the berg, and beyond the sound of the boys' voices.

Hervey had seen the overhanging block, and realized in an instant how little was required to capsize it and close the entrance of the grotto.

A hasty glance around convinced him that he was unnoticed, and with one sharp blow he broke away the support of the ice slab, which by its own weight was quickly slid into place in front of the opening, locking it as if with a key of ice.

"Let them get out of that if they can!" he hissed, as he hurried on.

The boys were not missed until some twenty minutes afterward, when the party came suddenly upon a deep fissure in the ice, extending right across the path, and running down to a considerable depth.

The path ahead of them was now visible for a good mile, the ice being smooth and unbroken, and the boys ought to be in sight.

They were not, however, and the Innuits pointed down the chasm, their faces indicating the greatest alarm.

"Where are the young gentlemen?" asked Hervey. "I hope nothing has happened to them."

"The natives seem to think they've fallen down this crack, but it's so dark down there that you can't see, and seems to me we'd ought to've heard them holler."

"The ice must have given way suddenly beneath their feet. An extra pressure of their sticks might have opened an unseen crack, dislodged a thin layer of ice, and hurled them into this living grave."

Topp knelt on the edge of the crevice and peered down into the darkness, vainly endeavoring to pierce the awful gloom of the place.

Then Hervey shouted the names of the boys, betraying the utmost anxiety, and playing his part so well that no one suspected that by his treachery the boys had been placed in a danger nearly as great as they would have been in had they actually fallen down this chasm.

It was impossible to go down into the depths and determine what had happened to the boys, for there were no ropes, and

even the Innuits did not dare risk climbing down the ragged edges and projections of the crevasse.

"Them two boys must be lying way down at the bottom; maybe dead, and anyhow, badly hurt," said Topp. "It's funny we don't see no tracks, nor their staffs, nor weapons."

"The ice here leaves no traces," said Hervey; "and their staves and rifles are with them. We must summon assistance at once."

"We'll have to get back to the steamer anyhow, for it looks like a storm, and we've been out now as long as is allowed, and longer."

"Not if the weather had remained the same; and I was in hopes of seeing something to make a favorable report of, but I'm afraid we're in for a winter in the pack, and maybe longer. We can do no good here, so let's hurry back to the vessel, and get a party to go in search of these unfortunate young men."

All hands thereupon hurried back toward the vessel, Hervey taking care to strike a fresh path which would take them away from the stranded berg in which the boys were imprisoned.

Hervey saw with delight that there was every prospect of a heavy fall of snow, which would soon obliterate the path they had followed, fill the chasms in the ice, and cover up the trail so that the searching party would be unable to find the spot where Dick and Ralph were supposed to have been lost.

Meanwhile how fared the two boys in their icy prison?

They shouted in vain, and at last desisted, concluding that the ice was too thick to permit of their voices being heard, and that their companions had gone on, believing them to be still in advance.

There was light enough in the place for them to see, though not very distinctly; but this was better than being in total darkness.

Finding the place where the slab of ice had slid into place, they began attacking it with the steel points of their sticks, with the hope of piercing it.

All they could do was to make a few holes, and chip off a few splinters of ice, the main body remaining firm under their attacks.

"We can dig around it if we can only keep at it long enough," said Dick; "but the trouble is, we may have to stay here all night without food or fire."

"It isn't cold here now."

"You don't feel it, perhaps, because it is warmer than the outside, but you'd be cold by morning, I guess."

The boys continued to bore with the steel points for some time, and at length Dick exclaimed suddenly:

"By Jove, this boring has given me an idea. Suppose we blast this ice-slab instead of trying to split it."

"Good! But we have no powder."

"We have cartridges, and we can open them, and use the powder inside."

The boys were each provided with a stout jack-knife, and they now pried off the tops of two or three cartridges apiece, emptying the powder into Dick's handkerchief, a corner of which was torn off, wrapped about the powder and thrust into the hole which Dick had last bored in the ice.

It was then tamped down as hard as possible, one end of the handkerchief sticking out for a fuse, Ralph setting this on fire with a match which he struck on his boot.

The linen burned slowly, but the boys did not dare approach too close to it for the purpose of fanning the flame, lest they should be in danger from the blast.

They retreated to the further end of the grotto, Dick stepping upon something soft, which suddenly moved beneath his foot.

He sprang aside just as a tremendous growl broke upon his ear.

The truth flashed upon him in an instant.

The "screw" of the berg was the home of a bear, cast away

in some unaccountable manner, and it was he upon whom the boy had stepped.

Their situation was thus rendered doubly perilous.

If they retreated the blast might cause the ice to fall upon them; if they remained, the bear would attack them.

"Where the mischief did he come from?" asked Ralph, who was on the other side from Dick.

"Don't know. Take him in the flank if I miss him—I'm going to shoot."

It was lucky that the boy's rifle was loaded, for there was no time to lose.

The fuse was beginning to burn more brightly, and it could not be long before there would be an explosion.

The bear, however, had arisen, and was now advancing upon him with distended jaws and glittering eyes.

Suppose the first blast should not prove effective?

In that case the bear must be dispatched at once.

Raising his rifle to his shoulder, Dick took as careful aim as the circumstances would permit, and fired right for the creature's eyes.

There was a howl of combined rage and pain, and the huge brute made a sudden bound forward.

Dick leaped nimbly aside, and Ralph fired, the muzzle of his piece pressed right against the animal's flank.

Uttering a frightful roar, the bear rushed at Dick, who fell to the floor in his hurry to escape.

At this moment there came another explosion, and the grotto was filled with the smoke of gunpowder.

The blast had taken place, and with much better success than the boys had hoped for.

The slab of ice had been split in two, and although there was not room for them to pass, the boys could look out and feel the air from the outside entering the cave.

They had more light also, and this was what they needed in working as much as anything.

The question just now, however, was not how they could get out, but whether the bear was likely to give them any more trouble.

Looking back, they saw him lying on the icy floor of the cave, his tongue hanging out of his mouth, his eyes closed, and a stream of blood slowly oozing from his huge jaws.

"I guess we've settled him," said Ralph, "but it's as well to be sure."

Dick quickly reloaded, and, taking careful aim, fired point-blank at the monster's heart.

There was a low groan, a convulsive struggle, and then the huge beast lay outstretched upon the ice, the blood flowing from a wound in its side.

Both boys now approached, and satisfied themselves that the animal was dead, Ralph trying to roll him over.

"I tell you, Dick," he panted, giving up the effort, "if that fellow had fallen on you or got a good grip on you once, it would have been all day with you and no mistake."

"Well, suppose we leave him for a while and see if we can split away some of this ice?"

The boys now attacked the edge of the ice with their sticks, and succeeded in half an hour's time in making an opening large enough to put their arms through.

That was all they could hope to do in this line, unless they wanted to work all night, and neither of them cared to do this.

They each had half a dozen cartridges left, and with the greater part of these they formed a charge, having bored a much deeper hole than before, drove it home, making a fuse by rubbing a long strip of linen with bear's grease, Dick having cut the carcass open to obtain it.

When all was ready they lit the fuse and retired, anxiously awaiting the explosion.

It came at last; the barrier of ice was rent from top to bottom, and the boys were free to walk out of their prison.

CHAPTER VI.

SAFE AGAIN ON BOARD SHIP—MERRY CHRISTMAS.

The shock of the blast had been considerable, but fortunately nothing had given way but the block in the entrance, or otherwise the boys might have been as badly off, if not worse, than before.

To clear away the rubbish was the work of a few moments only, and then the boys stepped outside, and felt they were once more free.

The next thing to do was to look for their comrades, who were doubtless filled with anxiety concerning their fate.

"They can't know where we are, or they would have heard our voices and tried to get us out," argued Dick.

"Then they may have gone on ahead to find us, thinking that we had lost our way. And that makes me think. Do you suppose you could make your way back to the Hope?"

"Yes, but I don't want to try it to-night."

"Why not?"

"Don't you see that it is beginning to snow? How far do you suppose we could go before we would be utterly blinded and bewildered, and lose our way?"

"It does not snow much."

"No, not now, but I don't propose to trust an Arctic snow-storm at this distance from the vessel."

"And to-morrow is Christmas. We ought to be at home."

"At home?"

"Oh, I mean on board; but then you know a sailor's home is his ship."

"Well, so would I like to be at home, then, but I don't want to go to sleep in a snow-bank to-night, so suppose we go in and get our supper?"

Even while the boys had been talking the snow had begun to fly much thicker than at first, and it was easy enough to see that if they had started, they would not have gone far before they would have been obliged to stop.

With their knives the two boys now stripped off the hide of the bear, a job which took them some little time to accomplish, not being used to such work, after which they cut off several slices of the tenderest portions, and laid them on the ice to dry.

There was nothing to make a fire with, nothing to melt the fat of the bear in, and they were therefore obliged to eat their meal raw and do without a fire.

Dick made a light by taking Ralph's handkerchief, wrapping up a piece of fat in it, and then lighting it and sticking it in a crack in the ice.

As night advanced, Dick's watch telling them of the flight of time, the darkness lasting constantly now, relieved only by the aurora, the snow fell thicker and faster, until it was impossible to see through the blinding white clouds which whirled along the path just outside their shelter.

The boys perceived the wisdom of their course in having remained in the cave, for even if they had no fire, they were sheltered, and decidedly safer than if they had been obliged to burrow under the snow until morning.

They sat just beyond the influence of the wind, and watched the storm, chatting at intervals until long after their usual time for retiring, a big snowdrift having by this time formed just outside the ice grotto.

It was growing cold now, and the two chums retreated, therefore, to the furthest corner of the cave, and, wrapping the bearskin closely about them, with the fur side to their

bodies, they nestled close to one another, and soon fell asleep in each other's arms.

The warmth prevented them from awakening, and so they slept on through the wild night, the snow drifting in at the entrance to their singular retreat, and covering a considerable area with soft, fleecy particles, the wind howling without as though in anger at the boys' escape from its bitter touch.

When the boys awoke on Christmas morning the snow lay thick over all the path, and in the entrance of the cave, so that when they arose and looked out they hardly recognized the place.

The storm had ceased, the wind having died away at the same time, and although the air was cold, it was not uncomfortably so, owing to the stillness of the atmosphere.

After breakfasting on raw meat, the boys took their sticks and set out for the Hope, Dick slinging the bearskins and several pounds of meat over his shoulder, while Ralph took the two rifles.

Dick followed the path, and when he reached the open ice was able to determine the general direction he was to take, although he could not see the vessel as yet.

After they had proceeded for a couple of hours in as straight a line as they could determine, they suddenly caught sight of a party in the distance, evidently coming from the direction of the vessel.

Dick discharged his rifle, and when the sound had died away the signal was repeated by the other party, which at once changed its course and hastened toward them.

It was not long before Dick recognized the captain, his friend the doctor and Hervey in the party, and, dashing forward, the boy cried merrily:

"A merry Christmas to everybody. Here we are, safe and sound, and with something for dinner!"

Not long after this Captain Hudson clasped his son to his heart in a warm embrace, while the eccentric doctor began fussing around him, feeling his limbs, his nose and ears, sounding his lungs, and counting his pulse-beats, exclaiming, disjointedly:

"No bones broken—nothing frozen—pulse regular as a chronometer—eyes bright—blood in good shape—well, well, the boy is a marvel!"

Then he put Ralph through the same examination, the boy being very much amused thereat.

"Why, doctor," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "there is nothing the matter with us; did you expect there would be?"

"Nothing the matter with you! That's just what puzzles me. Young gentlemen don't fall down an ice-cleft thirty feet deep and sleep out in the cold all night without something being the matter with 'em. You must have the constitution of Polar bears."

"No, but we have the skin of one, and besides, we didn't sleep out all night, and didn't fall down any holes; we slept together, like a couple of spoons in a box, with a bearskin around us, and were as snug as could be."

Then Dick told the story of their adventures, Hervey watching him narrowly to see if there was any suspicion in the boy's mind as to the real cause of his having been shut up in the ice grotto.

"No, he suspects nothing," the man said to himself; "neither he nor his chum, and I am safe. It's a wonder they got out of it as cleverly as they did, but that shows me that I must make my plans beforehand, and not trust to chance, as I did this time, if I want to get the young villain out of the way."

The whole party, much relieved at having so unexpectedly come upon the two boys, when they had expected nothing less than to find their dead bodies at the bottom of some hole in the ice, even if they found them at all, now turned their steps toward the vessel, which they reached in little more than an hour.

"This is indeed a merry Christmas for me, Dick," said Captain Hudson, as he and the two boys entered the comfortable cabin, "and I am thankful that the day brings me one source of enjoyment even in the midst of so much that is disappointing and vexatious."

"We'll make a merry day of it, anyhow, for the sake of old times, father, and some day we will laugh at what seems so annoying now."

"Perhaps," returned the other, sadly; "but I cannot help thinking that fate is against me after all; else why, in spite of all my caution, all my calculations, should I have blundered right into the pack, whose grip is as tight as that of death? Well, well, boy, this is no day for such thoughts; so, as you say, let us indeed have a merry Christmas, if only to show our thankfulness for your safe return."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH OF BOLTON—THE ACCUSATION.

Christmas Day on board the Hope passed as merrily as even Dick could have wished, every one, from captain to cook, seeming to be in the best of spirits, and doing their utmost to make the occasion as agreeable a one as possible.

There was an extra fine dinner in the cabin, and the men were given certain little luxuries which they did not have on ordinary occasions.

In the evening there was a concert and theatricals in the men's quarters, to which the officers and captain were especially invited, and which passed off very pleasantly.

After this things went on much as usual until the new year set in, and then, as the weeks rolled by without any change, the men began to grow discontented; complaints were frequently heard, and more than once muttered threats were breathed against the captain, who was considered as having been the cause of all the trouble.

Hervey had not forgotten the ice-pilot, Mr. Bolton; and, as he had promised himself, kept a watch upon this gentleman.

In the matter of the narrow escape of the two boys, Bolton had unequivocally expressed it as his opinion that there had been something wrong somewhere, and that Hervey ought to have kept a sharper lookout upon the young fellows to see that they did not fall into danger.

"I am not so sure that the fellow would not have been pleased if something serious had happened to one or both of the boys," he said openly to the doctor.

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. I have watched the man considerably, and I know that he hates Dick, or, at least, has no very great love for him."

"But what motive——"

"Oh, I don't know that, but I'm sure there is one somewhere."

"But Dick never saw the man before. He might possibly have some cause for hating the captain, and strike at him through Dick; but he's always respectful, always willing, seems to regard the captain most highly, and——"

"Does Captain Hudson remember having seen the man before?"

"Why, really—well, I couldn't say—that is—no, I don't believe he has."

"He hesitates; the captain has known the man, and knows no good of him," thought Bolton, "and, for some reason or other, this fellow has a spite against him. I must watch him more closely. I suspected him at the time we got caught in the ice, and yet I could not put my suspicions into shape to make an accusation against him."

"Oh, well, I may be mistaken," said Bolton, aloud, in a careless tone, "but I fancied the man had, as you say, some grievance, and meant to settle it by doing harm to Dick. You have not mentioned the affair to anyone?"

"Why, no—I think not—bless my soul! I can't remember everything—no, I am sure I have not done so."

"And I am sure you have," again said Bolton to himself, "and to the captain himself."

The conversation was not continued, for at that moment Dick and Ralph appeared, and the subject was changed.

There was one man who had heard this talk for whose ears it had not been intended.

This was Hervey himself.

He had been concealed in a dark corner of the cabin where the conversation had taken place, and had heard nearly all of it.

As soon as the place was cleared he made his escape, muttering to himself:

"So he suspects me, does he? Aye, and more than he says, I am sure. He won't have an opportunity of ventilating his suspicions any more, if I know myself."

After this the villain narrowly watched Bolton, even as he was himself watched, though without apparently seeming to do so.

One day Bolton left the steamer to take a run over the ice, and, attracted by the sight of some Arctic foxes which somehow had got out upon the ice, and who were playing among themselves at some distance, started off, gun in hand, in chase of them.

He was seen, and pursued with as keen a desire as he himself approached the foxes, and with the same intent.

He took care not to be seen by the animals; his enemy took as much care not to be seen by him.

The man in pursuit was Hervey.

He had his gun with him, but he did not intend to use it if he could avoid doing so, fearing lest the sound should bring some one to the spot.

Bolton had to go further than he had intended, the foxes having changed their position, and thus it happened that he had arrived at the stranded berg, the one containing the wondrous grotto, before he could obtain a good shot.

He fired and brought down one of the animals, and as he did so another shot was heard.

Upon the instant the man felt a sharp pain go through his body, and then he fell headlong upon the ice.

He turned his head, and beheld Hervey approaching.

"Ha! it is you that have fired upon me," he gasped, trying to rise.

"Fired upon you! No, indeed; I fired at the foxes."

"It is a lie," groaned Bolton, his strength leaving him, and the blood gushing from his mouth.

Then, recovering himself for a brief spell, he cried:

"You intended to murder me, because you have seen that I know your baseness, but you will not succeed, for I have still strength left to reach the vessel."

"You will never reach it!" cried the miscreant, and, leaping forward, he struck Bolton a blow on the head with the stock of his rifle that stretched him on the ice apparently lifeless.

Hervey looked around, and espied the cave of the iceberg.

Seizing the man by the shoulders, he dragged him within the dismal recesses.

There he left him, lying on his back, his glassy eyes turned to the ice-dome above him.

"He must not be found," the wretch muttered.

Then he began collecting blocks of ice, piling them up in the entrance.

Block by block he walled up the opening, scattering snow over his work as it progressed.

He worked rapidly, and at last had the entrance completely closed.

Into all the crevices he packed the snow, so that all appearances of the place having been walled up might disappear.

When he had finished, he went away a few paces and examined his work.

No one would have known the place for what it had once been.

"Let them find him now if they can," he muttered.

Then, picking up Bolton's rifle, which had fallen on the ice, he hurriedly left the scene of his crime.

On the edge of a deep gully in the ice—so deep one could not see to the bottom, he threw Bolton's rifle and the body of the fox he had killed.

No one had seen him leave, no one saw him return.

An hour later a party from the Hope, consisting of Dick, Ralph, Topp, Melton, the chief engineer and the two Esquimaux, came upon Bolton's rifle lying upon the edge of a pit.

Beside it was the body of an Arctic fox, cold and dead.

The ice on the edge of the pit had been freshly broken, and on its glittering surface were the prints of bloody fingers.

"Some poor fellow has fallen down there," remarked the engineer. "Who can it be?"

Dick picked up the rifle, examined it, and cried excitedly:

"This belongs to Mr. Bolton. Here is his name engraved on the stock."

So saying, he handed the weapon to the engineer, who quickly corroborated his statement.

"Poor Bolton!" he murmured. "He was a good fellow, and one whom we could ill afford to lose."

"Can't we get down there and recover his body?"

"I fear not. This ice is very treacherous, and doubtless the water is beneath. He must have been carried away long ere this."

There was evidently nothing to be done but return to the steamer with the sad news, and accordingly the little party at once set out.

Contrary to Hervey's belief, Bolton was not dead when left in the cave.

He was merely unconscious, and in time he recovered.

He was very weak from loss of blood, however, and, without proper care, was in great danger of dying.

Crawling to the side of his prison, he made his way slowly around it, trying to find an outlet.

There was none, nor could he find the place where Hervey had walled it up.

"Oh, the heartless villain!" he gasped. "I have been left here to die. There is no escape for me."

He tried to rise, so as to find some point where he could dig his way out, but his strength was not equal to the effort.

Then a mad despair seized him, and he made the icy walls ring with his cries for help.

Alas! there was no one to hear him.

He felt himself cold and stiff, and knew that he must die.

He was beyond all human help, and nothing could save him.

No one would think of looking for him here, believing him to have fallen down the crevasse.

He knew that unless help arrived, he would not live through the night.

In the morning he would be frozen to death, even if he did not die of his hurts long before that.

He could not escape, but at least he would name his murderer, so that some day the wretch might be discovered.

He had his note-book in his pocket, and, tearing out a leaf, looked for something with which to write.

He could not find his pencils, and, feeling the blood oozing from his side, dipped his finger into this, and traced on the leaf these words:

"Hervey has murdered me and shut me up in an ice cave to die.
BOLTON."

Then clutching the leaf in his cold hand, he sank unconscious upon the ice.

Would the accusation ever come to light?

Time will show.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCOURAGEMENT—TREACHERY.

Week after week passed, and the motion of the drift-ice began to be more apparent than formerly.

Then leads appeared in the ice, short lanes of water leading nowhere.

The sun once more appeared, but his light brought little comfort.

The snow was removed from around the vessel, and the house on deck needed less protection than before.

The air was still keen, and the mercury never went above thirty-two degrees.

With partial breaking up of the ice came a startling discovery.

The vessel had sprung a leak!

The ice, rushing beneath them, there being no other outlet for it, had, in spite of the cradle in which the Hope lay, so rubbed and pounded upon the bottom of the unfortunate vessel as to open her seams, besides staving a hole in the bows large enough for one to insert an arm.

Now that the ice beneath them was less solidly packed, the water had a better opportunity to enter.

For a long time the locality of the leak could not be discovered, and the pumps were obliged to be kept going half the time.

Meanwhile, they were still drifting to the eastward, the ice still holding them in its strong clutch.

At last the exact situation of the leak was discovered, and preparations made to stop it.

It could not be reached from the outside, so that a thrummed sail might be placed over it, the ice being too thick to make cutting down to the leak practicable.

Whatever was done must be from the inside.

The flow of water was stopped temporarily, and then the hold was pumped entirely dry.

After this it was possible to thrum a sail over the aperture, and thus keep the water from entering so rapidly.

When this had been done, the carpenter and his assistants got to work and covered over the break, so that there should be no further cause of apprehension from that source.

Weeks succeeded weeks, months gave way to other months, the brief Arctic summer passed, and at the end of a twelve-month from the time they had been caught in the pack ice, the hapless navigators found themselves in the same predicament.

"That's nothing," said the veracious Topp one day in November, the winter again facing them. "A man I once knowed made a trip like this, and was caught and kept in the ice for twelve years, without even drifting.

"The ice was packed so solid that it couldn't drift, and for twelve long months they lay stuck fast without no motion."

"Twelve months!" said Ralph. "You said twelve years."

"Did I say years?" said Topp, a somewhat puzzled expression crossing his countenance. "Well, I can't tell a lie, and if I said years I'll stick to it.

"Well, sir, there that vessel was fast in the ice, and the poor sailors had nothing to do but grumble and growl. I tell ye what, it's mighty few men that can stand being obliged to

associate with each other for even a year, day in and day out, without fightin'. It ain't in the natur o' man to do it. He wants a change o' faces, and if he don't get 'em, he fights.

"Well, sir, the cold was so strong that the wood o' the ship shrunk so that the seams was all opened, and the water came in and froze, and then lifted the vessel out of the ice by contrary pressure. D'ye see?"

"I see that you're trying to tell a bigger lie than usual," retorted Dick, with a laugh, "and can't do it without stopping to think."

"I cannot tell a lie," said Topp, "and ye'd orter know that by this time."

"Well, if you can't, you certainly make the best attempts in that line I have ever seen."

At this there was a general laugh, and Topp retired, discomfited.

Winter was again approaching, and the men, seeing the object of the expedition as far away as ever, became discontented and gloomy, nothing but a firm hand preventing them from breaking out into open mutiny.

Hervey, crafty as a fox, and cunning as a fox, took every opportunity to foment dissatisfaction among the men, and animosity toward the captain, and yet doing it in such a way as to escape all suspicion, his openly expressed admiration of the captain being a matter of general remark.

There was nothing to do but remain on the vessel as long as it held together, and Captain Hudson would not listen to the idea of abandoning it, and trying to reach the land in the boats, and across the ice in sledges.

However, when the spring again came around, and the second anniversary of their setting sail had arrived, the vessel was found to have been greatly injured by the pounding and grating of the ice beneath it.

The pumps were obliged to be kept going day and night, it being now impossible to stop the inflow of water.

The vessel leaked in more places than one, and at last, one day in June, after a serious consultation in the cabin, held by the captain and principal officers, it was deemed imperative to make preparations for abandoning the vessel.

The sledges were removed to the floe, the boats placed upon them, the nautical instruments, charts, logs and other records placed in safety, and the work of removing the stores begun.

During the whole of one day all hands worked heroically, and at night tents were erected upon the ice, to be used in case of an emergency, a large portion of the stores having been removed.

The night passed by tranquilly until within an hour of daylight, when a sudden trembling was felt throughout the vessel.

The floe which supported her was giving way.

What would result from this could only be guessed at.

The orders had been that the vessel should be abandoned at the slightest notice.

The first officer rushed hurriedly below, and knocked on the door of the captain's room.

The commander had already aroused himself, and was now hastily dressing.

"Let the men leave at once!" he cried, from within.

The officer went away, and at the next moment Dick, Ralph and the doctor hurried by and made their way on deck.

The passage was evidently deserted.

Not so, however, for a dark figure suddenly appeared, and, stooping before the captain's door, listened for an instant.

"Aha, my time is come!" he hissed, "though I should have liked a few minutes more."

The man was Hervey, and his thoughts were still busy with his revenge.

All the occupants of this part of the vessel had gone on deck, the captain excepted.

At that moment the door opened and the captain appeared.

Suddenly springing upon him, the villain hurled him back into the room with irresistible force.

One hand was placed upon the commander's face, and the odor of some pungent drug could be detected.

The captain gave a gasp and fell across his bed, unconscious.

With a smile like that of a triumphant fiend, Hervey suddenly abstracted the key from the lock and passed out into the space beyond.

To shut and lock the door on the outside required not a moment's time.

"Now, Captain Hudson, I am partly avenged!" he hissed, "and my next move is against your son. I swore to kill you both, and all others that should dare to interfere with me in my work."

Then hurling the key into the darkest corner, the villain passed through to the steerage, and reached the deck from that point.

Hurrying down the side, he reached the ice just as all hands beat a retreat, shouting that the vessel was sinking.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETREAT BEGUN—MURDER COMES TO LIGHT.

The ice had even now begun to be violently agitated, and no one knew when it might break up.

The sledges would float, and these having been hastily removed from too close proximity to the vessel, the men now took their places in their respective boats.

Then it was noticed, for the first time, that Captain Hudson had not yet left the vessel.

"Mr. Rawlins," shouted Dick, "have you seen my father?"

"He told me a few minutes ago that he was coming on deck at once, and directed me to make all haste in leaving the vessel."

It had now begun to grow light enough to distinguish objects clearly, and all eyes were turned toward the Hope, in the expectation of seeing the captain appear at any moment.

Suddenly there was heard a loud report, as of a hundred cannon being discharged at once.

The foe supporting the little steamer had suddenly been broken, and for an instant the vessel floated in open water.

Then she was seen to be rapidly sinking.

"My God! where is my father?" cried Dick, in agony. "He will be lost!"

The ice in the near neighborhood of the sledges now began to show signs of breaking up.

The position was therefore abandoned with all haste.

Foot by foot the Hope sank in the water that surrounded her, till her decks were level with the sea.

And still her captain had not appeared.

"I must go to him," cried Dick, leaping out upon the ice. "Perhaps he has been suddenly taken ill—he may have fainted; at all events, he does not know his danger."

"No, but I do!" muttered Hervey to himself.

Dick would have thrown himself into the water to swim to the vessel, had not Ralph prevented him by clasping his arms about the boy and staying him.

"Stop! Stop! You can do nothing, Dick," he cried.

And, indeed, the truth of his words was at that very instant made apparent.

Suddenly, with an awful plunge, with the swiftness of lightning, the Hope rose up forward till her bows were entirely out of the water, and then in the smallest part of a second dived down, stern foremost, into the icy depths.

It was all over in less than a second!

The Hope had gone down, and her brave commander had perished with her.

"He would not abandon his vessel, the brave man," said Hervey to himself, but in tones that all could hear; "and he has gone down with his pet, and both are buried in the same grave."

This idea was accepted by nearly all as the true reason of the captain's absence just before the foundering.

"I supposed he was going to follow me at once," said Mr. Rawlins, "for he urged me particularly not to delay an instant. Yes, he undoubtedly intended to go down with his vessel, and yet was most careful that every one else should escape."

When the sun arose, soon afterward, nothing remained to show where the Hope had gone down; not a spar, not a bit of wreckage—nothing!

The sea had swallowed her up in an instant, and all that was left of her was the memory of her beloved captain.

The only thing now left for the survivors of the expedition, was to seek to reach land.

All hands remained in the vicinity of the catastrophe that day, observations being taken in order to determine their exact position.

The nearest land was ascertained to be Eastern Siberia, and thither the course of the boats was to be directed.

The distance to be traversed, considering the detours to be made in order to avoid the rough ice and the numerous blind channels, or even as the crow flies, was estimated to be at least two hundred miles, and this must be made in the face of every possible danger.

On the morning succeeding the going down of the vessel the whole party, consisting of four boats' crews, began the retreat, no one knowing whether success or failure awaited them—all holding their lives in their hands.

Mr. Rawlins headed the first cutter, and with him were Dick, Ralph, the doctor, Topp and three seamen.

The second cutter was commanded by the second officer, and with him went one of the Esquimaux, the chief fireman and his mate, and half a dozen seamen.

In the whaleboat, headed by Mr. Melton, the chief engineer, were Hervey, one of the Esquimaux, the naturalist of the expedition, two firemen and a coal-heaver and three seamen, the remainder of the survivors going in the longboat.

"I might have gone in the boat with that young whelp," muttered Hervey; "but I'm just as well satisfied, for perhaps it will be better for me that I did not."

As long as the sledges could be drawn across the ice the boats would not be used, as more stores could be taken in that way than if they had been obliged to resort entirely to the boats.

Nothing but what was absolutely necessary was taken, and Dick left an extra coat behind him, so that he might not have too much to carry.

At times the boats could be used as bridges in crossing ponds of water, the skirting of which would have cost the party a great loss of time, and here Dick and Ralph proved themselves of considerable value, being able, owing to their light weight, to cross over places where a heavier man would have broken through the thin ice.

It must not be supposed that Hervey, villain though he was, neglected his duty or shifted upon other shoulders work that properly belonged to himself.

On the contrary, he exerted himself to the utmost, often assisting both Dick and Ralph in the performance of tasks more arduous than they had supposed them to be when undertaking them.

There was a motive in all this, for Hervey wished to quiet Dick's suspicions, if any really existed in his mind, so that

when his time for vengeance came he could more easily get the young man into his power.

Several days passed, the ice sometimes drifting by them, while that on which they were seemed to stand still, while at other times they seemed to drift, and the ice in the distance to remain fixed.

There was a berg which, detached from the rest of the pack, floated by itself, being remarked by all the party.

One day, this berg, coming in contact with a floe stronger than itself, a large portion was severed, and formed part of one which the expedition was obliged to cross.

Dick was in advance of his own party, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"Look there! If that is not just like the ice-cave where Ralph and I were confined."

It was, in fact, the very same.

Now, however, the wall built by the treacherous Hervey had been broken down, and the interior was exposed.

Dick and Ralph advanced with a curious feeling, and the former peered into the opening of the cave.

"Good God! What is that?"

Well might he start back with alarm, and point one trembling hand toward the cavern.

There on the cold ice lay the skeleton of a man, the whitened bones covered by a ragged blue uniform, while one bony hand clutched a scrap of paper upon which were traced a few words written in rude capitals, not with ink, but with human blood.

"God save us!" cried Mr. Rawlins, whom a cry from Dick had attracted to the spot, and who had glanced hurriedly at the paper in the skeleton's hand.

"What's the matter?" cried several, crowding forward.

"These are the remains of poor Bolton, and he has been murdered!"

CHAPTER X.

WITHIN AN INCH OF DISCOVERY—THE BREAK-UP.

"Bolton murdered!" cried Dick, starting back aghast at the terrible words of Mr. Rawlins.

"Yes; murdered!"

"But could he not have been shut in here the same as we——"

"No, no; he was murdered, and here is the proof!"

While he had been speaking he had taken the paper from the hand of the skeleton, and now held it out so that both Dick and the engineer could see what was written thereupon.

Hervey's face was livid, but by a superhuman effort he restrained himself and held his peace.

In an instant he had taken in all the bearings of the case, and had made up his mind what to do, no matter how the affair turned out.

This paper was something new to him, for he had always supposed that Bolton had been dead at the time he was shut up in the ice, and now, here was perhaps a dreadful accusation staring him in the face.

The paper had been torn, and on it, in large capitals, was the following:

HAS MUR-
ME AND SHUT
IN AN ICE
O DIE
BOLTON

"The paper has been torn," said Dick, "and is incomplete."

"What remains is clear enough," added Melton. "He says

someone 'has murdered me and shut me in an ice,' berg, perhaps, 'to die,' and then signs his name, Bolton."

"But the name of the murderer is missing," cried Ralph. "Who is it?" and he glanced quickly upon all the faces about him.

Certainly the face of Hervey showed no more guilt than did that of Dick, or of Mr. Melton, or of anyone there.

He was excited, as were they all, but no one could have said from merely seeing his face, that he was the murderer.

A great load had been taken off his mind, and yet, so well drilled had he been in concealing his emotions, that where in another this feeling of triumph would have been a betrayal in his face there seemed nothing but natural excitement.

"Where is the rest of the paper?" asked Dick, eagerly. "It must be in the fingers still."

There was certainly a small scrap of paper still fastened in the bony grasp of the skeleton, and the doctor now pressed forward to take it out.

Hervey was burning with rage and apprehension, and, had he dared, would have dashed forward and with one blow of his foot have ground the skeleton to powder, and torn the paper to atoms.

The doctor, with a deftness natural to one of his cloth, parted the fingers of the dead hand, and the scrap of paper fell to the ice.

Before he could pick it up, however, a sudden gust of wind swept into the cave, caught it, and whirled it up to the top, and then outside.

All hands chased the fugitive scrap which could have told so much, but it was quickly lost to sight, and was blown no one could tell whither.

"How provoking!" spluttered the doctor. "Well, well, I didn't think I was so clumsy!"

"Did you read it?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"Read it! No, indeed. Why should I read it?"

"You did not read the paper you took out of the skeleton's hand?"

"No."

A murmur of surprise ran through the company.

"I dropped my glasses and stepped on 'em—can't get another pair within a thousand miles—too bad, I declare."

"Did you see what was written on the scrap, Rawlins?" asked the engineer.

"No; did you, Melton?"

"Not I."

"Then we are as much in the dark as ever!" cried Dick, impatiently.

"Of one thing we are certain," said Melton. "Our poor friend has been struck down and left to perish by some one, whom he has named in this last memorandum."

"Who is it?" cried all, eagerly.

"He who committed the deed alone knows. Some day his conscience, now silent, will speak, and force the declaration from his lips."

Everyone looked at his neighbor, but on the faces of all the utmost horror was depicted.

Who could have done this awful deed, so long hidden from the light, but now revealed as if by accident?

"Chance has revealed this much to us," said Melton, "and Providence will reveal the rest. Henceforth I devote myself to the discovery of the murderer. He is among us, and must eventually be discovered."

"You do not think that my father could have committed the crime, do you?" asked Dick, with pale face and faltering accents; "and for that reason remained on board and went down with the vessel?"

"No!" cried Melton, Hervey, Rawlins and Ralph.

"No!" echoed all the rest.

"The man is with us," said Hervey, with the most unblush-

ing effrontery, "and I, for one, will help you, engineer, in finding him out."

Melton had not once suspected Hervey of the crime, and now he was even still further from doing so, the man's earnest manner having completely deceived him.

"Your hand on it, Hervey," cried the engineer, seizing the man's hand and pressing it warmly.

No one but the most accomplished in villainy could have stood a test like this, but Hervey came off triumphant, and not a soul then even suspected him in the slightest degree of having had a hand in poor Bolton's death.

The doctor had more than once suspected that he intended some injury to Dick, but of late the man had disarmed even these suspicions, and now the worthy doctor, shrewd as he was, was as much a believer in the man as anyone.

After this they continued upon their way, camping on the ice at night, and resuming the journey in the morning.

They followed as straight a course as possible, their destination being the shores of Siberia, whence they expected to make their way overland to the nearest settlement, after which they could obtain help.

Mr. Rawlins, Engineer Melton and Hervey were considered the leaders of the retreat, and Dick and Ralph aided them in many ways, cheering the despondent, helping the weak, and exerting themselves to the utmost.

Cleat, the jolly carpenter, was constantly poking fun at Topp, the lugubrious cook, and the disputes between them always managed to put the men in good spirits, which was as important as being in good health.

"You'll be willing to allow that you've walked over rougher country than this, I s'pose?" asked Cleat of Topp one day as they were dragging the sledges along over the smooth ice.

"'Course I have. I can't tell a lie, and so I say that once, when I was in the south Pacific, crossing the ice floes, we had to climb over about a dozen icebergs a thousand feet high afore we could get along.

"Not o'ny ourselves, but all our baggage had to be toted over, and you'd better believe it was no fool of a job, neither. The sledges weighed fifteen ton apiece, to say nothing of other traps, but then we had one advantage.

"When we got to the top of one berg, we could jest let things slide, and down to the bottom a-flyin', and sometimes halfway up to the top of another berg we stopped.

"Them times we had to be careful so as not to slip back, and one time the fust mate missed his hold and went flying down backward to the bottom and up the berg he had jest slid down, and so down again.

"Well, if you'll believe it, and I cannot tell a lie, he kept swingin' back and for'ard between them two bergs, jest like a pendulum; now down, now up, then down again, then up and down, for'ard and back, every time coming a little short of his previous mark.

"We cal-lated that if he kept that thing up, that it'd take him about six weeks afore he'd stop, and as we couldn't afford to wait that long, we made up a plan to bring him to a standstill.

"We went down, just where he stopped going down and began going up, and when he reached that p'int, we chucked a bit of ice as big as a house right in front of him, and made him come to a halt so sudden that he went flying over our heads like a comet, and that's the truth, for I cannot tell a lie."

"No," grunted Cleat, "but you can come as close to it as any man I ever saw."

"What's that?" suddenly exclaimed Dick. "The ice is breaking up."

"To the boats!" shouted Rawlins, "or you'll be lost. The ice is breaking. Look out that you are not crushed!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORM AND WRECK—FATE STILL ADVERSE.

A sudden change of wind, an extra thaw, a shifting of the under ice, something not readily to be determined, had suddenly left a large open space in the ice ahead of the party, and that all around them began now to break up.

The boats were hurriedly launched, but in the confusion some of the provisions were lost, and the longboat was crushed by ice.

The men were thrown into the icy waters, the boat itself sinking, the other boats going at once to their assistance.

The turbulent state of the water, the dashing spray, the biting wind that suddenly arose, and the danger which alike threatened all the rest, all these things conspired against the effort, and before the poor unfortunates could be reached they had sunk beneath the chilling waters, never to be seen again.

It was close upon night, and the storm increased as the darkness grew more profound, until at last the occupants of the several boats could not see those in the other ones.

In the first cutter Mr. Rawlins attempted to make sail, but no sooner did the canvas meet the breeze before it was whipped into ribbons, and the boat nearly capsized.

As it was, the gunwale was under water for a few seconds, and two poor fellows were thrown over into the icy flood.

Despite the efforts of their comrades to save them, the unfortunate seamen were lost, the chilling waters quickly benumbing them, and preventing them from helping themselves, or from crying out so that the others might know where they were, being unable to see them in the thick darkness that prevailed.

Dick shouted, that those in the other boats might try to save the two men, but the wind prevented their hearing him, and very likely no one saw the poor fellows after they were first thrown into the water.

It was hardly necessary to use oars, the boat being driven forward at so rapid a rate, but they were employed in order that the men might not become chilled from being inactive.

There was literally nothing to be seen, so thick were the clouds, and the danger to be apprehended from being swamped was therefore the greater.

The waves would dash upon them with great violence, and somebody was kept constantly bailing, lest they should go down.

Finally Mr. Rawlins managed to get out a steering oar, by means of which he kept the boat headed to the wind, and thus prevented her from taking in as much water as formerly.

Then a boat's lantern was got out, and, after several failures, was lighted, the men shielding the wick and the match with their coats until this was accomplished.

It was then hoisted to the top of the broken mast, which had been shattered at the time the sail was blown away.

The light gleamed through the darkness, and although it revealed nothing to those in the boat themselves, it undoubtedly showed their position to the others.

For some time the men pulled in silence, their situation being not at all conducive to talkativeness, when Dick suddenly cried out:

"Light ahead, sir!"

"Aye, aye!" answered Rawlins. "I see it myself now."

"It must be in one of the other boats."

"In one of them, yes; but where is the other?" asked the doctor, suddenly breaking into the discussion.

"Aha, Dr. Davids, you haven't your glasses on, I am afraid. Are you sure that you can't see two lights?"

"No, I'll be blessed if I can," he returned, bluntly, "and I don't believe you can either. Come, now, do you see more than one?"

"No, not at present; but doubtless before long——"

Then he paused, as if fearing to present both sides of the case at once, the hopeful and the discouraging.

If the other boat still floated it would doubtless soon show a light and set all doubts and fears at rest.

On the other hand, the occupants might not have provided themselves with a lantern, although that seemed hardly probable.

They looked long and patiently for a second light, and at last Dick, chancing to look behind instead of ahead, as he had been doing, suddenly sang out cheerily:

"Light, ho! There it is, sir, astern of us, and here we've been looking ahead all this time for what we might have seen a long time ago."

Sure enough, there were two lights visible, one ahead and the other astern, and they therefore knew that their friends were still safe and sound.

Hour after hour the wind howled around them, the waters dashed upon them and the ice threatened them, the light alone preserving them from this last danger.

Suddenly Dick saw one of the lights go out, but he said nothing, as he did not wish to cause needless alarm.

The extinguishing of the light did not necessarily mean that the boat had been swamped, for an accident might easily have happened to it and not to the boat itself.

The young fellow waited anxiously for the reappearance of the light, however, and presently he saw it again.

It seemed to be lower down on the water than it had formerly been, however, and Dick argued from this that the mast had been broken, necessitating hanging the lantern lower down.

After a while both lights disappeared, but their own went out shortly afterward, so that this argued no danger, or, at least, not necessarily so.

All night they drifted on and on, scarcely knowing whither, and at last the day dawned, the storm still raging as violently as before.

As the light increased, the men strained their eyes to catch a sight of the other boats, looking in every direction.

Nothing was to be seen but floating masses of ice, some quite large, and others quite small, or made up of broken bits, slush and snow wedged together, but easily breaking.

At last, from behind a large iceberg, there emerged the whaleboat, commanded by Melton, in which were also Hervey and some of the firemen and sailors.

This was indeed a welcome sight.

Where was the other boat, however?

Had she gone down during the night?

Perhaps she had been simply driven out of sight, and they would ultimately come across her.

The matter was decided an hour after breakfast in an unexpected manner.

Dick and Ralph sat well up forward, armed with sharp pikes, shoving away the masses of ice which came too near for safety, or, when this could not be done, preventing the boat from running against them by pushing off in time.

They had just rounded one of these dangerous masses, when Dick uttered an exclamation of surprise.

There, just ahead of them, stretched at full length upon a cake of ice some twelve feet square, lay the body of a man clothed in furs.

He was lying upon his face, and could not be, therefore, identified at once.

"Perhaps it's one of our poor fellows, after all," said Dick, "one of those whom we lost overboard last night."

"H'm, I guess not—he wouldn't take a lantern with him—not likely, I fancy," sputtered the doctor. "That accounts for the light going out and reappearing again."

"What do you mean?" asked Rawlins. "Pray explain yourself."

"Ha! guess somebody else has forgot their specs this time. Are you blind, man? Don't you see that lantern on the ice alongside the man?"

Dick had seen it, and as the boat now came up to the ice he thrust out his pike, and made fast, while Ralph took up the lantern.

"It's plain enough," said Dick. "The boat was swamped, this one man being thrown upon the cake and the lantern falling beside him. He has known enough to set it up, and that is how we managed to see it again."

"And keep from running the poor fellow down," added Rawlins. "Who is it, Dick, my boy?"

Dick and Ralph turned the body over, and revealed the face.

The man was Mr. Ransom, the second officer of the Hope, and late in command of the second cutter.

"Is he alive, Dick?"

The young man put his hand on the man's heart, and also on his wrist, but felt no answering beat.

Then he placed his ear close to the unconscious officer's chest, and listened attentively.

There was no sound, and the man's face wore the hue of death, his hands, even when the gloves were removed, being like lumps of ice, and devoid of all color or feeling.

"I am afraid——" began Dick, when the doctor bluntly interrupted him.

"Let me look at him," he said, bending over the rail and making a rapid examination.

Blunt and brusque though he was, his eyes suddenly moistened, and he turned away, muttering half to himself:

"Poor fellow! the voyage is over for him, at all events, though the Lord only knows what we poor wretches have got to suffer before we go under."

"Dead?" asked Dick.

"Frozen to death. Poor fellow, he was doubtless stunned by a blow on his head—I saw the mark—and just knowing enough to put the lantern upright, dropped off into a doze and so died. Well, his troubles are over, at any rate."

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUARREL—SUSPICIONS—THE MARCH OF DEATH—LAND.

None of the other unfortunate occupants of the boat were ever discovered, having either been drowned at the time of its foundering, or carried away on bits of ice to meet death later on, as the hapless second officer had done.

The latter's body was taken into the cutter, which waited for the whaleboat to come up, when the saddening news was related.

"I am sorry for poor Ransom," said Hervey. "We might better have spared someone else."

"That's not a very feeling remark," cried Dick, indignantly. "It's equal to saying that you wish somebody beside Mr. Ransom had died."

"I can't help your putting wrong constructions on innocent remarks," returned the other, quietly; "but even as you construe it, I do not see as it is far wrong."

"Who could we have spared, then, rather than Mr. Ransom?"

"Myself, for one."

"H'm! I don't know but you're right," sputtered Dr. Davids, bluntly.

"You, for another," returned Hervey, unabashed. "You may be a good physician, but you can't manage a boat or guide us over the ice."

"There must be others, then," said Dick, angrily.

"Well, I don't think the entire salvation of the expedition depends upon your being along, Master Headstrong," returned Hervey, in calm tones, in which contempt could be seen lurking.

Dick flushed crimson, and from more causes than one.

The name that Hervey had called him had been given to him once before, some years back, and he remembered the man and the circumstances well.

He darted a sudden look toward Hervey as if to read his inmost thoughts, but the man's face told him nothing.

"It might have been better for the expedition," he retorted, angrily, "that you, at least, had never joined it."

"Stop—stop, Dick; I will have no more of this," said Rawlins, sternly. "We are all in an equal danger, and it is not manly to quarrel at such a time."

"Let him alone, boatswain," said Melton to Hervey, in a low tone, putting his hand on the man's arm. "He is but a boy, and you must not expect as much from him as from the rest of us. Think what he has had to suffer in losing his father."

"I have suffered, too," returned Hervey, musingly, "and I am not used to being chaffed by a mere boy. I shall exact as much from him as from anyone, and shall give him the respect due his rank, and no more."

The boats now separated, and Dick, as they tossed upon the angry waves, thought to himself:

"Was it mere accident his using those words, or is he really the man I imagined for an instant? Certainly I can see nothing in his face to remind me of the other; but then, five years might make a change.

"No one else ever called me 'Master Headstrong,' and the look, tone and manner were the same. Can it be possible that the incorrigible Jack Murden has again turned up?

"The ruffian was flogged by my father's order when nothing else would subdue him, but even that did not seem to answer, for he was more furious than ever. I know he tried to beat me afterward, and father laid open his cheek with a riding-whip.

"Well, it can hardly be the same, for Jack would be older; and then he had an ugly scar on his cheek which this fellow has not. However, I don't like him, and I mean to watch him."

While these thoughts were passing through Dick's mind, Hervey was equally busy with his own reflections.

"What a fool I was to give him that old name," he murmured to himself. "He looked as if he would read my soul. He does not know me, I am convinced, or he would have denounced me before them all.

"Pshaw! what do I care for a boy like that? I avenged myself on his father, who gave me a mark I shall never lose, and now it is the son's turn. It was he that caused me to be marked for life, so let him beware."

Days and days passed, the survivors of the ill-fated Hope meeting with various haps and mishaps during their retreat.

Constantly exposed to the intense cold and the cutting winds which swept across the barren expanse of ice or over the stormy sea, many of the men received severe frost-bites, which caused them the utmost suffering.

Part of the time it was impossible to get through the ice, and then the boats were drawn up and dragged on the remaining sledges over the glittering waste.

The constant glare affected the eyes of many of the party, and Rawlins was made blind, it being a question if he would ever recover his sight again.

Still the party pushed toward the south, camping in tents on the ice at night, this simple shelter but little protecting them from the rude blasts of this inhospitable region.

Often the ice would be found to be so rotten that without an instant's warning they would break through and sink into

soft slush up to their arm-pits, from which they would be dragged by their comrades.

Then, with frozen garments and chilled to the bone, they would be obliged to keep on in their weary march without shelter or change of clothing, getting warm as best they might.

To add to their sufferings, they lost one of the sledges containing provisions, a sudden breaking up of the ice causing this much-to-be-regretted disaster.

The boat was crushed, and soon sank beneath the waters, carrying with it the hope of the party, the accident causing them all the greatest sadness.

When they should again be compelled to take to the water the remaining boat would not be able to accommodate them all, and this thought, it may well be imagined, was anything but comforting.

Before that time, however, poor Rawlins, now become totally blind, fell dead from exhaustion and hunger.

His death was succeeded by those of three or four of the sailors, and thus, one by one, the little party was reduced in numbers.

At last, after many weary days of almost inconceivable suffering, the party reached open water again, and were obliged to take to the only boat they had left, this being greatly strained from having been drawn across the ice.

The sledge was abandoned, its weight being now too great to put upon the party already weakened by their sufferings.

For days and days more they tossed about on the waves without a guide, having lost their instruments, but trusting to instinct to take them in the right direction.

One night, when all was so black that they could not see a yard in advance of the boat, they suddenly ran with great force upon the ice; the boat was staved, and two or three men pitched into the water.

Hervey and Melton sprang out upon the ice, and assisted Topp, Cleat and the doctor to do the same.

Dick and Ralph followed, as the boat was sinking, but managed to save a few packages of pemmican and some bottles of alcohol.

Bunt, Bowline, Hall and Reefer were thrown into the water, but Bunt and Reefer alone emerged, the others being borne down by the tumbling and rocking masses of ice, which prevented them from getting upon the solid floe.

The survivors spent a dreary night, not daring to push on in the darkness for fear of accident, and dreading that at any moment the ice would break up and the waters engulf them.

Morning dawned at last, and the weary, cheerless, fatiguing march was resumed.

Hervey, Melton, the two boys and the doctor had knapsacks containing food and spirits; Topp and Cleat carried the half dozen rifles belonging to the party, and Bunt and Reefer bore two axes apiece.

The ice seemed firm, and Melton judged that it made fast to the shore, which could now not be far off.

The hardships which the miserable explorers now endured can hardly be described.

They were without shelter or the means of making a fire, and at night were obliged to lie down as close together as possible under the lee of some ice-mound, passing the hours of darkness in troubled sleep, which brought neither rest nor refreshment.

They were forced to drag their weary limbs over rough hillocks of ice, in danger constantly of breaking through, at times wading in slush up to their waists, subject to hunger, cold and thirst, and seeing no sign of human habitation, or of anything that could cheer the eye.

The distance made each day was by no means considerable, so that it was a week, after reaching the main body of the ice,

before they at last reached land, three of their number having succumbed under their almost incredible sufferings.

The jolly carpenter and the two seamen had gone to join their comrades, and the number of the survivors was now reduced to a scanty half dozen.

Topp, the solemn and truthful cook, actually cried when he saw the last of poor Cleat, and muttered between his sobs:

"I can't tell a lie—blow me if I can—and for all the aggravation—that that fat scamp of a carpenter cost me—him always a-disputin' o' my word—I'm as sorry to lose him as if he—he—he—he was my brother, so I am, and that's the gospel truth, for I can't tell a lie, and the Lord only knows what's to become of us in this desolate country!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DREARY LAND—DICK RECALLS THE PAST.

The survivors had reached land at last, but what a land it was.

One cannot imagine a more desolate and abandoned region than that in which the poor wanderers now found themselves.

There was not a green thing to be seen; the ground, when not covered by snow, being dry and sandy, with dwarf trees scattered here and there, their dead branches and withered leaves rustling in the chilly air as though even they could feel the cruel blasts, and partake of the sense of desolation which pervaded all the scene.

There was little vegetation, and no animal life, both brute and human having evidently fled from the place in terror.

And through such an inhospitable land must the castaways make their way before they can reach civilization.

The provisions were divided, so as to give each man an equal weight; one rifle being given to each, and the axes given to the strongest.

Nothing was carried except what was absolutely necessary, because it would not do to burden themselves with any extra weight, no matter how light.

The guns were retained, in case they might meet with game, and the axes were to be used in cutting wood for fire, or clearing away a place in the ice to sleep at night.

Melton, the engineer, had been in the neighborhood before, and to him was assigned the task of guiding the party.

It was his plan to keep along the coast, as what settlements or habitations they were likely to find would be there rather than in the interior.

So the dreary journey through the wilderness commenced, the men keeping together, and doing their utmost to cheer each other's spirits.

"If you can justly say that any country is God-forsaken," muttered the eccentric surgeon, as he trudged on, "this is the one, and I don't believe the great desert of Africa is any worse. At all events, you can't complain of cold in those parts."

"You wouldn't believe it if anyone else told you," broke in Topp, with a sad smile, the nearest approach to merriment that he ever made, "but at times, on that 'ere desert of Sahary, it's really quite cold, as cold as it is here, though they ain't no snow there."

"I just remember, a great many years ago, of bein' wrecked on the west coast of Africa. It was in the bark Commerce, Captain Riley, that this thing happened, and we was took by a lot of wandering Arabs and marched across the desert."

"Well, if I was capable of telling a lie, which I ain't, ye wouldn't believe me when I tell ye how hot it was during the daytime. Why, the sand was red-hot, and the air was fairly steamin', and the sweat that came on a feller's face was set to b'ilin' in a second."

"Ye should see it some nights, though, to know what cold was. Gosh! the sand was like ice, and a feller's breath would freeze. Only fur there not being no ice nor snow, ye'd fancy that ye was in the Ar-tic."

"I didn't have no thermometer with me, so I can't prove it, but I'll be willin' to bet that it went down to a hundred below freezing p'int."

"That won't do, old man," interrupted Dick, with a laugh. "I've read Captain Riley's book, and though he says it was cold, he don't run it as low down as you do, and, besides, your name isn't once mentioned in the whole book."

"Wal, now, what an oversight that was. When I get home I'll have a new edition struck off. I tell ye I can't tell a lie if I was to try, and it was cold there of a night. Why, the camels came near freezin' to death, and the milk what the Arabs put by over night was like ice-cream in the mornin'."

"Tell me it wasn't cold! Wasn't I there! Why, I was full o' frost-bites, and I was durned glad when the sun came up of a mornin', sayin'."

"How d'ye do, old Topp? Blamed if I don't give ye a scorcher this day, to make up for the chill ye got last night."

"Then I'd just get nicely thawed out, when down would go the old sun, sayin' good night, and that he hoped I'd have a cool evening of it, and then I'd freeze up again. Talk of the heat of that there desert, why, it ain't nothin' when you think o' the cold."

"Then you're lucky," put in Ralph, "for you're used to it, and we ain't."

"Well, if there was a prize given to the biggest liar in creation," sputtered the doctor, with his usual frankness, "you'd get it with a special mention thrown in, for you're the worst—most up and down—out and out—perverter of the truth that I ever saw."

While Dick and his chum were always in good spirits, Hervey remained taciturn and almost gloomy, although he never spoke of giving out, and never complained, no matter what trials he had to go through.

Wet to the skin from frequent breakings through the snow-crust, frantic with pain from frost-bites on fingers and toes, always hungry—the supply of food being insufficient to allow of a hearty meal at any one time, lest all should be exhausted, and the dreaded catastrophe anticipated—evidently suffering both in body and mind, the man never complained, never grumbled, scarcely ever spoke, even; when addressed answering in monosyllables.

Yet he did not seem disheartened, but kept on at the engineer's side, frequently assisting him, sometimes giving the others help, and evidently saving his strength for greater trials, notwithstanding the severity of the existing ones.

It now began to be noticed that his hair and beard were growing decidedly gray, which made the lines of age in his face more apparent than before.

Dick imagined that the hardships to which the man had been subjected were telling upon him, and making him older; but one day the doctor "let the cat out of the bag," as the saying goes.

"Ha! you forgot to bring your dye with you when you left the vessel," he blurted out. "Murder will out, won't it? Gray streaks at the roots of your hair, white lines through your beard; even that fine black mustache getting rusty and dusty—what would your woman say, you old beau? H'm! the secret is out at last! You're ten years older than you look!"

"I never made any secret of dyeing my hair," muttered Hervey. "I told you I did when I first came aboard."

Dick pricked up his ears at this, and gave Hervey a searching look.

"Confound that meddling old fool!" thought the man. "The youngster will know me now, and it will spoil my plans, for he'll be on his guard."

"Mr. Hervey, did you ever know," asked Dick, carelessly, "a man by the name of Jack—. Pshaw! I thought I had his name right on my tongue. Jack—. What the mischief was his name? You remind me of him now, only he wore no beard, and had an ugly scar on his left cheek, caused by a blow from a whip."

"The young dog knows the name well enough," thought Hervey, during the above, "and is trying to sound me."

When Dick spoke of the scar and its cause, Hervey's face became livid for an instant only, however, as he quickly regained the mastery over himself.

"I was sure of it," mused Dick. "It is the same."

"The young demon!" mentally observed Hervey. "He remembers all. Never mind, for, on his guard or off, I shall yet repay on his head, as well as on his father's, the insults I have endured at his hands."

"Oh, I have it!" exclaimed Dick, suddenly. "His name was Jack Murden. Did you ever know him?"

"No," was the careless answer, the man betraying no emotion, though he would have liked to strangle the boy at that moment.

"Well, he wasn't a very nice sort of fellow to know, for he was a surly brute, and perfectly ungovernable. My father, when in the navy, was obliged to have him flogged one day, although the practice had been abolished.

Hervey expressed neither by look nor word the hatred he felt, and Dick resumed.

"He tried to avenge himself on me for the punishment he had received, and one day, on shore, knocked me down, made a scar on the back of my head which I shall never lose, and was about to give me an unmerciful beating, perhaps kill me, when my father suddenly appeared, with nothing but a riding-whip in his hand.

"He sprang upon the ruffian and dealt him a blow on the cheek with the loaded end of his whip, cutting to the bone, and making a scar which remained until the last day I ever saw the scoundrel.

"He was degraded for insubordination, and would have received a greater punishment had the offense been committed on board the vessel. He went away when his time was up, and I have never seen him since, and doubtless his ungovernable temper has been the cause of his death, in some brawl or quarrel, long before this."

"You have a pleasant way of talking, Master Richard," said Hervey, with scornful emphasis; "you ask me if I knew such a one, remark that you are reminded of him by seeing me, and then proceed to relate a story of some desperado or other. Did the man beat you for your want of good manners? Upon my word, if he did it was well-deserved. They used to teach boys to be gentlemen in the navy, but you apparently skipped that branch in your education."

"You are Jack Murden himself, and no other!" cried Dick, hotly.

"Pshaw! I never heard the name to this day," returned Hervey, carelessly. "Don't be a headstrong fool!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MANY PERILS OF THE MARCH—HERVEY'S DISCOVERY.

After this little incident the days wore on, the little party keeping up their dreary march, which every day seemed to grow more hopeless.

Dick was satisfied that Hervey was the man he supposed him to be, and yet the latter still had the advantage of him, as he remained perfectly cool and self-possessed, and, after the

first ebullition of anger had passed away, made no further allusion to the affair, and acted just as he had always done.

There was nothing in his conduct that Dick could seize upon as corroborative of his theory that the man was still nursing his revenge, nothing to prove definitely that he was really Jack Murden and although satisfied of the truth of both of these suppositions he was obliged to hold his peace until some later day.

He had tried to force Hervey into an admission of the truth, but had failed, and so determined to be more wary in the future.

The rate at which the journey was carried on was necessarily a slow one, for many reasons, and, at last, the last of the available provisions gave out, with no prospect of the stock being renewed.

Nothing had been shot or even seen, the country being evidently barren of life, both animal and human.

Their boots were nearly worn out, their clothes needed constant attention, their feet and limbs were sore and weary, and there was scarcely a moment in the day when any of them could say that he was sufficiently warm.

Here they were, thousands of miles, maybe, from civilization, and hundreds at least from any human habitation, in a country of which they literally knew nothing, exposed to dangers of all kinds, and without the least shelter from the weather.

At last, after being three weeks on the march, after having suffered the most unparalleled privations, they found themselves without food, the only possible means of sustaining life being two pint bottles of alcohol saved from the stores.

Night was coming on, and it had begun to snow, thus adding to their almost insupportable trials the danger of being frozen to death, for none of them seemed able to proceed or to make their usual shelter.

Hervey and Melton were in advance of the rest, and when the heavy flakes began to come down the engineer fell exhausted upon the hard, sterile ground, and cried:

"Oh, my God! the end has come at last. Push on, Hervey, if you have strength; reach some town or village and bring help for the rest, for I cannot go another step."

"Make an effort, man; we must find some shelter soon."

"No, no, it is impossible; and even if we did, it would avail me nothing, for I am dying."

"Don't say that, for I'd rather die myself than have you go. It is not right that men inferior to you should live while you perish."

"Kneel down here by me," said the engineer feebly, "and listen to what I have to say. As you value your own life, your own peace, forego your scheme of revenge on poor Dick."

"How do you know I have one?"

"From what has been said, from what you have muttered in your troubled sleep, I know you have some fancied wrong which you wish to avenge, but in such a situation forget it."

"He and his father both treated me most cruelly, and I shall never forget it. I settled the old one, and now the young one must—"

"What do you say? Had you any hand in the loss of the—"

"I shut him in his cabin just before the steamer went down. That was half my revenge. The rest is to come."

"My God! do you dare to tell me this?"

"Yes; for you are the only one in the world that I respect, that I would do anything for. Raise yourself up, man, get upon my shoulders. I will carry you till we reach a shelter, for we must do so soon. Fate cannot be so cruel as to deny us this."

The engineer made a rapid gesture with his hand as if to put the man away from him.

"You must let me do what I can for you," cried Hervey impatiently.

"No, no; save Dick. He has strength yet, but I am dying."

"Save him! I'd lie down in the snow and die first."

This was said with such a vindictiveness that no room was left for doubting the intense hatred with which he still regarded our hero.

"Oh, man, man! have you no heart?" cried the engineer.

"Yes, for I would save you, even at the cost of my own life, for you have treated me as a man; this young upstart I hate, and I'll kill him yet if I get the chance."

Melton uttered a cry of pain and fell back unconscious.

Hervey looked at him a moment and then hurried forward into the blinding snowstorm which now raged.

The others had fallen by the way, but Dick and Ralph, determined to seek some kind of shelter, had renewed the struggle, and now came upon Melton.

"That scoundrel has killed him!" muttered Dick. "They were together when we last saw them. I am sure he is not the first victim, either."

"What can you mean?"

"I'll be willing to swear that he killed Bolton. There's no one else that would do such a deed. He is an evil-minded brute, and has always been a hard character."

"Is that you, Dick?" asked the feeble voice of Melton at that moment.

"Oh, thank God! he lives!—he is not dead!" cried both boys, joyfully.

"Where is Hervey?" asked the engineer.

"Not here, and I feared he had killed you."

"He has gone to look for shelter. You wrong the man, Dick. He threatened to give up entirely if I did not allow him to carry me on his back."

"That was only an excuse. I believe the man is mad. He killed poor Bolton beyond a doubt, and he'll kill us all before he gets through, if he can."

"Mad, do you say? What did he say to me about— No, no! I cannot believe it! and yet, his hate, his vengeance, his bitter—"

"What are you saying, sir?" asked Dick, for the engineer had suddenly stopped.

"Nothing; it was only my fancy. I am afraid I am dying, boys."

Dick was about to reply, when there came a sudden shout through the darkness.

"Answer him; it is Hervey returning," said Melton, excitedly. "He cannot find us. Answer him."

"I don't care if he never does," said Dick, doggedly. "We shall be all the better off without the company of such a miserable villain."

Hervey's voice was heard again, and this time Ralph answered him.

Evidently guided by the sound, the man presently made his appearance, and, kneeling down, took the engineer in his arms and supported his weight upon his shoulders.

"Ha, ha! you shall not die!" cried he, with a wild laugh. "I have found a shelter, an old hut deserted by the natives. You shall have shelter and a fire, and we will bring you around in a short time."

"You are deceiving him, you are luring him to his death!" cried Dick, about to spring upon the man and detain him.

Hervey laughed scornfully, and, shouldering his weight manfully, disappeared in the darkness, saying:

"Follow me if you like, and you may perhaps enjoy that which has been prepared for your betters."

Both boys hastened after the man, and soon came upon an old half-ruined hut, abandoned by the natives of these regions, apparently, which yet afforded some shelter still from the rude blast.

In the former fireplace of this primitive dwelling Hervey had already built a cheerful fire from loose bits of wood lying about the ruins, adding thereto the twigs and stunted branches of a withered tree, which he had cut down with his ax.

He placed Melton near the fire, in a position where he would be free from draughts, and then hurried out, leaving Dick nearly petrified with astonishment.

CHAPTER XV.

A MAN OF CONTRADICTIONS—MELTON'S DANGER.

In the course of five or ten minutes Hervey returned, bringing in Topp and the doctor, whom he had found lying half-buried in the snow and nearly unconscious.

The hut had been originally built of rough slabs, bark and tree branches, plastered on the outside with mud, and having but one entrance, with a hole in the roof to let the smoke out.

The door had been merely the skin of an elk, or some such animal, nailed to the cross-beams of the opening, and portions of this still remained.

This Topp and Hervey cut off with their knives and tore into strips, which they began chewing most voraciously, there being still some fat and bits of dried flesh adhering to the skin.

The rear of the hut was still in a fair condition, though the front and one side were badly ruined, great cracks appearing in the walls and some of the wood lying on the floor.

The wind, fortunately, beat upon the better parts, which thus afforded the unfortunate explorers a most welcome shelter, and greatly ameliorated their terrible and almost hopeless condition.

The roof was broken away in parts, but these could be patched up so as to keep out a considerable draught, so that really the hut was a perfect godsend to the poor, half-frozen travelers.

After the rule winds, the lack of any shelter but the lee of an ice-mound or the middle of a snow-bank, and the hard ground for a bed, this miserable hut seemed a palace, and the cheerful blaze an inexpressible blessing.

Melton sat up, braced his back against the boards, and, holding his hands out to the fire, said feebly, though with heartfelt gratitude:

"Hervey, you saved my life, and although I have not many days to live, I shall at least spend them in comfort."

That night was one of the best they had spent in many weeks, and even Topp was actually made cheerful and laughed and told his veracious yarns in the liveliest manner imaginable.

The supper consisted of an old bootleg, the remains of the elkskin door and half a gill of alcohol apiece, the bill of fare being as limited as it was tough, but there were warmth and shelter, and these made amends for the shortcomings in other directions.

Lest anyone should imagine that I am exceeding even a novelist's license in making my characters dine off such unpromising articles as a sealskin boot or an old battered hide, I refer them to the accounts of more than one party of explorers, forced to retreat from these inhospitable regions, and especially to the most recently published accounts, which must be still fresh in their minds, for confirmation of all that I have written, assuring them that, for harrowing details, I have not told them the half of the sad tale.

The next morning Melton was too weak to leave the hut, and he begged that they would go on without him.

"Keep on in the same general direction we have been going,"

he said, "and you must reach some settlement in the course of a few days. Then you can return for me."

"Yes, and find you dead," muttered the doctor. "Better go with us."

"But I can't move."

"But we can move you."

"How?"

"There are branches enough to make a litter of," interposed Hervey, "and we can take you along with us."

"No, no, you must leave me, or you will all perish. I will not see you die that my life may be prolonged a few days. Push on, and then if I am not alive when you return, you will at least have saved yourselves, and if I am still alive so much the better."

"Who is to go, then?" asked Hervey. "Some one must remain behind to take care of you."

"Then do you go ahead, you and Topp and the doctor. The boys can take care of me, and you will soon return."

"I can't leave Dick," sputtered the doctor. "I and his father were friends—old chums—blessed if I leave him alone in this howling wilderness—got to look after him—take care of him—no one else will or can, so I must."

"I'll go alone, engineer," said Hervey, "for your sake, anyhow, and if help is to be got, I'll bring it back."

"I'll go with you," said Topp, dolefully. "I can't tell a lie, and I'll say squarely that I don't like this here place, but I don't want you to go and get lost, so I'll go along."

"That's settled then," muttered Hervey.

A heavy snowstorm had again set in, however, and it would have been madness to start at such a time.

Delay was therefore unavoidable, and yet every hour was precious.

To show the inconsistencies in human nature, this man Hervey, who was so bitter against Dick, who had deliberately murdered Bolton that the man might not inform against him, who had meditated the doctor's death in order to silence his suspicions, this same man could make sacrifices for Melton, who he knew was also suspicious of him, and treat him with the tenderest kindness.

In spite of his wickedness there seemed to be one kind spot in his heart, and he now denied himself many things that Melton might be the more comfortable.

The fire was husbanded as much as possible, so as to make it last, and Hervey piled away all the wood that could be spared from the house, so as to keep Melton in fuel during his absence.

He gave up his own ration of alcohol, and even stripped off an inner coat he wore and spread it over the man; and yet he would have killed Dick or the doctor, or both, in an instant had the occasion offered, without feeling the least qualm of conscience.

For two days they remained in the hut, a dense fog succeeding the snow, and rendering the start equally dangerous as the storm had done.

Melton still continued to grow weak, notwithstanding the care he received, and at last Hervey determined to go at all risks lest further delay should result in the man's death.

"I will come back," he said, as he set forth, his rifle slung over his shoulder, and accompanied by the cook.

"I know you will," murmured the sick and half-starved engineer.

When out of hearing, Hervey turned to the others, who had followed him a few steps, and said scornfully:

"Don't think that it's for love of you that I take this risky trip, for if you only were concerned, I wouldn't bother my head about you."

"The chances are now that we won't see anything of you again," retorted Dick angrily. "You are just the kind of man to abandon your comrades in distress."

"I shall come back for Melton's sake, not for yours. If he could be moved now, I'd take him along on my shoulders, and let the rest of you starve. I don't know as I've got anything against you Sargent, but as for you two, I'd be glad enough to find you dead when I get back and the engineer alive. Good day to you, and a good riddance as well."

Then he hurried off, joining Topp, who had gone on ahead, and presently both disappeared in the distance.

"Do you suppose he will return?" asked Ralph.

"Yes," muttered the doctor, "if only to carry out his schemes against Dick. He's the man Dick said he was—there isn't the least doubt of it—and he's bound to have his revenge—the rascal—but I'll be on the lookout. Your father was my friend, Dick, and bless me if I wouldn't die to save you from harm."

The three then returned to the hut, the engineer, who had concealed all that Hervey had told him, lest the man should not be intrusted with his mission, saying to them, sadly:

"He will return, never fear, if return is possible, for he has given his word to me; but, alas! I am afraid it will be too late."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ENGINEER SETS OUT FOR ANOTHER LAND.

Nearly a week passed away, and nothing had been seen or heard of the two scouts.

That they would return, the engineer seemed to believe, although they had been gone longer than he had expected.

The doctor seemed to be in two minds upon the subject, one time saying that he did not expect to ever see the two again, and at another expressing it as his belief that he did not know but that Topp would induce Hervey to return, or at least come himself.

Ralph had nothing to say whatever, being in a weak, semi-conscious state the most of the time, and taking little or no interest in what went on about him.

Dick, however, declared emphatically that he was certain the men never would come back; Topp might want to, but Hervey would prevent him in one way or another.

At last, when a week had passed, and there was absolutely nothing to eat, not even the scraps of fat and dried meat which had before satisfied them, and only a small quantity of alcohol remaining, Melton called them all to his side.

They had burned all the wood they dared and still leave a shelter behind them, and now the fire had gone out, and all was cheerless and desolate.

There was a feverish light in the engineer's eye and a hectic flush upon his haggard cheek, and although he spoke clearly, there were the unmistakable signs of dissolution in his whole frame, and his comrades knew too well upon what he intended to speak.

"Come here, my friends," he said in a feeble but perfectly clear voice. "My life is ebbing out, and I have lived even longer than I thought I should."

"Make a fire, boys," cried the doctor, suddenly. "It may be that the men may come back after all. God forbid that I should judge them too harshly. An hour or two might make a difference of a life. Rip off the loose slabs and break 'em up. The hotter the fire the less the draught."

Dick needed no second bidding, and in five minutes, there being a few matches left, there was a roaring fire going, the genial warmth putting them all in better condition than they had been in for some time.

It was at the expense of their shelter, but still they did not know but that the sacrifice would be well repaid, and this was no time for hesitation.

"It's no use, friends," said the engineer, smiling, "for my

time has already more than run out, and death is even now waiting for me."

"No, no; we will save you yet!" cried Dick, making the man swallow a few drops of alcohol.

"No, Dick, I am going, but I have something to say. I do not believe Hervey will return, for I fear that he has perished. I am sorry for the poor fellow, for I believe he was crazed by his sufferings.

"He told me that he had prevented your father from leaving the vessel when she went down, by shutting him up in his room, but I do not believe it. The man was undoubtedly delirious when he told me so."

Dick shook his head, but the dying man did not observe him do so.

"More than ever, I do not believe he will return," he thought to himself; and the doctor was of the same opinion, although he said nothing.

"His threats to you, Dick, did not mean anything, I know," the poor fellow went on. "He imagined you had done him a wrong; and this idea taking possession of his mind, caused his ravings. You will forgive him, will you not?"

Dick inclined his head, although he felt very nearly certain that he should never live to see the man again.

Melton spoke but little after this, seeming to grow weaker and weaker every minute, his eyes closing, and only his faint breathing showing that he still lived.

An hour passed, and it was getting dark outside, when Melton suddenly raised himself up, and said, excitedly:

"Hark! do you not hear them calling us? See! they are coming to take me away. A bright light shines along the path and I can see their sweet faces. Give me your hands, friends all, for I am going away. Is it not a beautiful sight?"

"Where?" cried Ralph, starting up. "I see nothing. My God, am I going blind? Dick, doctor, do you see anything?"

"Not what he sees, old fellow, for my eyes are not yet opened to such sights. Hush, my boy; our friend is passing away."

"Dying?" whispered Ralph, taking Dick's hand.

"Yes."

"Don't you hear the music now?" asked the dying man. "See! the clouds have opened and a troop of bright angels are sweeping down toward me. I see my mother and sisters—yes, and there are my wife and little children. No more alone; I rejoin the blessed ones that have gone before."

Then he seized the hands of his friends, grasped them convulsively, rained kisses upon them, and, with a low cry, expressive of the deepest joy and peace, fell back in Dick's arms, and ceased to breathe.

Death had at last released that noble spirit from its bitter sufferings, and the three comrades were left to mourn him.

All night they watched by his dead body, saying nothing, but thinking many things, and when the morning came, arose sadly and began the silent preparations for the final disposition of these poor remains.

When they came to lift the body they found, under where the man had been in the habit of lying, a hole dug in the hard earth, and in this was a bottle of alcohol and two or three sea-biscuits, hard but palatable.

Then they realized to the full how noble the poor fellow had been.

Knowing that he must die, he had saved out his own allowance of alcohol that his friends might have it when he was done, and also such scraps of food as he was able to put by.

The man had really denied himself many times when he might have taken his own ration, in order that the others might have the means whereby to preserve life.

"Well, well, there are some unselfish hearts still left in the world," cried the doctor. "What one of us would have starved himself to keep the rest alive? No wonder he saw the angels coming down to meet him."

Dick could say nothing, for he realized the difference between the unselfish bravery of the hapless engineer and his own vengeful thoughts.

"I have been wrong all the way through," he muttered, "and the death of this brave and good man has taught me a lesson of charity and forgiveness I shall never forget. If I and my father have been injured, let a power higher than mine avenge the wrong. What have I to do with vengeance—I, who am as guilty in mind, if not in act, as that poor misguided creature? Even he denied himself, and who am I that I should judge him?"

The body of the engineer was then buried beneath the snow, the survivors shedding many tears over his poor remains, and then a plan for future action was decided upon.

It was settled that they must leave the place, and, following the route set down by Melton, endeavor to reach some human habitation.

The next day, therefore, they departed, scarcely knowing what was to be their fate, and yet trusting to Providence to bring their dreadful wanderings at last to a propitious ending.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE—OLD COMRADES—A MIDNIGHT INTRUDER.

Dick, Ralph and the doctor, a rifle over the shoulder of each, the scanty store of provisions left them by the noble-hearted Melton divided equally between them, and carrying but one ax to serve them all, set out early on the morning after the death of Melton, and traveled all the day wearily, only halting at night.

The way seemed easy enough to follow, as they had struck an old, long-disused wagon-road, the trail being plain enough, however, to keep them from going astray.

That night they lay under a bank where the wind could not reach them, but their sleep was troubled, their naps lasting not more than half an hour at a time, the cold keeping them from resting in comfort.

Two or three days passed in the same way, and then, to their great surprise, they found a little mud hut, large enough to accommodate them, the remains of a fire being on the stone hearth.

They rekindled this, and passed the night in comparative comfort, though their supper was but scant, and Ralph began to show signs of scurvy.

It was absolutely necessary to push on, however, and in the morning the journey was resumed, although Ralph seemed hardly able to drag one foot after the other.

His rifle was left behind, as he was unable to carry it, and the others had already as much as they could attend to.

There was nothing to shoot and the rifles were useless, and yet the three friends did not want to abandon them all for fear that the time might come when they would need them.

The next day, however, Ralph became so weak that Dick was obliged to almost carry him, and to do this he had to leave behind his rifle, ax and staff, the doctor retaining one rifle only and the ammunition.

That night what provisions they had gave out utterly, so that they had nothing, not a scrap of food, not a drop of alcohol.

Very fortunately, this night they found a deserted house, evidently once used by natives; or, perhaps, as a halting station for the poor exiles brought into these dreary wilds by the Russian government.

All this afforded, however, was shelter, as there was nothing whatever to burn, the house being built of loose stones cemented together with mud, and no food or anything to drink.

Ralph was delirious this night, and Dick was in a fever of anxiety lest he should die, although he well knew that such an event would be a relief as well to Ralph himself as to them.

In the morning the young man was much quieter, and Dick saw with alarm that unless help arrived the poor fellow would die before night.

Leaving the doctor to watch his friend, Dick set off, he knew not whither, himself scarcely able to drag along, and yet hoping that he might meet Topp or Hervey returning.

He did not meet them, but he did come upon them, after a two hours' walk, sitting in a hut before a fire, eating some salt fish and some very hard, very moldy, black bread.

Topp was glad to see Dick, but Hervey only frowned and said nothing, the welcome being confined to the cook, who seemed, now that their condition was really desperate, to have suddenly acquired that good nature which he had so long been without.

"I can't tell a lie, Master Dick, and I tell you I'm mighty glad to see you. Are you alone?"

Dick quickly informed him of the condition of affairs, and begged him to return at once and save Ralph if possible.

"I'm glad you're not so far away," returned Topp, "for we never could have reached ye if ye had been. Hervey and me have both been sick, and we hain't left this place for four days."

"And would you have returned when you got better?"

"No; we would not," growled Hervey. "It's every man for himself now, or we're all lost. You look out for yourself, and I'll take care of me."

"But you will come back to Ralph and help us bring him here, won't you?" Dick asked of Topp.

"To be sure I will. We found suthin' to eat here, and maybe the natives will come back. Anyhow, I'll go with you. Come along; we ain't got no time to lose."

Topp then took up his rifle, threw a little bundle on his shoulder and set out at once, Dick leading the way.

"I've got suthin' that'll do the boy good, and I ain't telling no lie, 'cause I can't do that, you know," said the man, when they had left the hut well behind; "only I didn't want to let that fellow back there know it."

"What is it?"

"It's a small bottle of lime-juice, not more'n half a pint, but it'll do him good. I saved it from the stores, and I've kept it all along just for a case like this. Then I've got a sea-biscuit in my bundle and some dried fish, but we won't let Ralph eat that, ye know."

"Oh, Topp, you're an angel!" cried Dick. "I wonder you could stay with that villain back there."

"Well, I don't like to leave nobody in distress, I don't, and I gave him my 'baccy to chew when we got out o' grub, and hadn't found this place."

In something less than two hours the comrades reached the place where the doctor and Ralph had been left, and Dick told the good news.

Ralph was soon restored to consciousness, and under the tender care of his friends recovered sufficiently to be able to sit up and talk with them.

Just at dark they reached the larger hut, having carried him all the way between them, and, putting him down by the fire, made him more comfortable than he had been for many a day.

Hervey had taken his departure during their absence, and nothing was to be seen of him, and really no one regretted his absence.

The next day Ralph was so much improved as to be able to continue the journey, and all four set out without delay.

Fortune seemed to favor them more now than it had done for some time, for at night they came upon a party of five or

six persons, men and women, of some mixed race, half Russian, half Indian.

They were in a rude hut, divided into two rooms by rough blankets hanging from the roof nearly to the floor, and were cooking their frugal meal when our little party arrived.

They appeared friendly and offered the newcomers food, consisting of coarse meal cooked with bear's fat and some dried fish, the latter seeming to be the staple article of diet throughout this region.

They could not understand the language of the whites, but they knew that the latter were tired, cold and hungry; and, as human nature is the same all over the world, they gave the strangers liberally of their scanty store, and made them more comfortable than they had been in a long time.

In the morning, the leader of the band, which seemed to be a family party, made the doctor to understand that they were going south, and that they must therefore separate.

He pointed due west, however, and then by signs indicated that at the distance of about twenty miles, as the doctor understood it, was a large town, the name of which the worthy surgeon found it impossible to repeat, or even remember.

However, it was enough to know that before many days they would reach some civilized place, no matter if they could not understand the language they heard, and all the party thanked their preservers many times.

When they came to separate, the Russians gave the Americans a quantity of food sufficient to last them three or four days, at the same time indicating that they would find more in the huts which they would meet on the way.

With much more hopeful spirits than they had possessed the previous day, therefore, our four friends continued their journey, sometimes finding shelter at night and sometimes being obliged to roll themselves up in the blankets given them by the natives and sleep as best they might.

Then a week passed and at the end of this time they found themselves in a hut at the entrance to a narrow and exceedingly wild mountain pass.

They found a bundle of dried fish in one corner, and off this they proceeded to feast, giving up an attempt to make a fire in disgust.

At last they rolled themselves up and tried to sleep, but Dick was restless and oppressed with some vague sense of impending danger, and could get no sleep, no matter how hard he tried to compose himself.

He could not tell whether the others slept or not, for they made no sound, and he thought it best not to disturb them as long as they found it possible to sleep under such circumstances.

At last, however, just as he was dropping off into an uneasy doze, Dick thought he heard voices outside the cabin, though it might be only the sighing of the wind.

He listened attentively, and in a few moments saw a shadow-form in the doorway and then heard a stealthy footstep^s proach.

"I wonder where he lies," he heard some one whisper. "Why isn't there a fire? I'd like to serve him as I did his father and that wretched Bolton!"

The truth flashed upon Dick in a moment.

The man was Hervey, and he had come here to kill him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VILLAIN'S AIM FRUSTRATED—A MISCALCULATION—IN THE RIVER
—DECEITFUL TRANQUILLITY.

Dick feared to cry out for fear he should not arouse his comrades in time, and that he would thus only enable Hervey the better to find him.

He determined to lie still, therefore, and if Hervey succeeded in finding him make all the resistance in his power.

He must be prepared, however, and pretending to have been partly awakened, he rolled over, so as to loosen his blanket, and put his hand upon the rifle which lay beside him.

"What's that?" whispered the villain, crouching to the floor.

Dick made no more noise after this, and at the end of a few minutes Hervey crept cautiously forward, murmuring scarcely above his breath:

"Some one stirred in his sleep, that's all. I wonder if it was he. I'll go that way and discover. I killed Bolton because he knew too much. I shut the captain up in his cabin to perish with his vessel, and I don't think I am afraid to kill this cub."

Then Dick heard him approaching, so stealthily that he could scarcely distinguish the sound, there being not enough light for him to see the form of the villain now.

Dick's heart almost stood still, and he trembled with the excitement the position caused him.

He was not afraid, but he would have preferred to see his enemy and grapple with him to better advantage.

Then, too, Hervey might strike one of his friends in the dark by mistake, and Dick was as anxious about them as he was on his own account.

At last he could stand the suspense no longer, and, half sitting up, he threw the rifle to his shoulder, and cried:

"Who is there? Speak, or I fire!"

Hervey uttered a low curse, and sank to the floor.

"Confound him!" thought the miscreant; "I have aroused him. He is evidently armed, too; so I must be cautious."

"Who is there?" again called Dick, louder than before.

"Curse you!" hissed Hervey, leaping to his feet. "I'll have your life in spite of everything!"

Then he sprang toward the spot whence the sound of Dick's voice had proceeded, a keen knife clutched in his hand, his teeth set with rage, his lips foaming.

Dick heard him and fired, less in the hope of hitting him than of arousing his companions.

As it was, the ball passed within an inch of Hervey's head, burying itself in the mud wall beyond.

The sound aroused Ralph and Topp, who sprang to their feet quickly and looked about them.

"Hervey has been here and tried to kill me," cried Dick. "Do not let him escape."

The baffled villain, seeing that his game was up for the present, however, quickly retreated after Dick had fired, and his hurrying footsteps were now heard going through the doorway.

The doctor was now aroused and all four held a hurried consultation, it being decided that they all should keep a watch, one at a time, until morning, lest the man should make a second attempt similar to the first.

Topp was to stand the first watch, Dick the second, and the doctor and Ralph, each to take an hour, or as near to it as he could reckon, and then waken one of his comrades.

Whether this had the effect of keeping Hervey away, or whether he had not intended to return that night, could not be told, of course, but certain it was that they saw no more of him.

The weather was still disagreeable, the fog being so thick that it was not considered safe to thread the mazes of the mountain passes, for fear of losing the way.

The next day, however, the march was resumed, the fog having lifted, though a fine drizzling rain had set in, which was almost as bad.

The party came out upon the other side just at night, and saw, not far ahead of them, a ruined hut, where they intended to remain until morning.

When they reached it, however, they found that some one

had only lately occupied it, and that it had well-nigh been destroyed by fire.

In the centre lay a pile of still smoldering embers, branches and scraps of wood, all consumed by the fire.

More than that, the hut had contained a quantity of dried fish, and these, too, had been burned, so that nothing remained.

"What wretch can have done this?" asked Ralph, in surprise.

"I'll bet that it was that there Hervey," answered Topp. "He is a regular dog in the manger. He couldn't use this stuff, and was bound that we shouldn't."

"If somebody would kindly put a bullet in him," snapped the irate doctor, "he would be doing all mankind a service—hang me if he wouldn't."

"Goodness knows we have enough to stand without this wretch trying to make our lot harder," said Dick, in despair. "The man must have a heart of stone."

"Well, we have at least a shelter over our heads—he couldn't pull the hut down—thank goodness," cried the doctor, "and our supplies are not all gone yet."

There was some consolation in this, to be sure, and considering how much worse off our friends had been, they did not find it all disagreeable.

The next time they halted they found that some one had been before them again, and a hut where they might have rested was a total ruin, having been burned to the ground.

"Hervey again," sighed Dick. "Will nothing satisfy his insatiable appetite for revenge?"

This time the rain came down in torrents, chilling them to the bone, and even a slight shelter would have been welcome, but there was none, not even a bank under which they might crawl.

The rain froze as it fell, and before long their clothes, blankets and weapons were covered with a stiff glaze of ice.

There was nothing for it but to lie down in their blankets and make themselves as comfortable as possible, and this they did, managing to catch an hour or so of sleep toward morning when the rain ceased.

For four or five days longer they kept on, sometimes finding a shelter which Hervey had evidently overlooked or been unable to destroy, and once they found some musty fish, which satisfied their hunger, although they made them all sick.

The town which their friends, the Russians, had spoken of did not appear, however, and they began to think that maybe they had gone astray.

"I have it," said Dick, at length. "It was not twenty miles, or twenty leagues, or versts, or whatever measure they have in these miserable regions, but a twenty days' journey."

"Then that means a month!" cried Ralph; "for of course we can't travel as fast as those fellows. My God! is there no hope for us? We shall all be dead before that time!"

"Cheer up, my boy, said Topp, cheerfully. "Why, if you'll believe me, and I can't tell a lie, you know, I once had to go thirty days without so much as a cracker, me and a dozen more of us, through a country that put this here to shame for roughness."

"We chewed our boot-tops, we ate lead bullets, we masticated leather straps, and all such things, till we didn't have no teeth left and our stomachs stuck together at the sides, all collapsed from havin' nothin' in 'em."

"And the country! Why, there wasn't a tree, nor a brook, nor nothin' but rocks fifty or a hundred feet high and as thick as pebbles, and we had to climb over or get around them the best we could."

"Talk of that, and this here is nothin'. If I could tell a lie, I'd say that this was the wust, most poverty-stricken, dead-and-alive, no account, hundred-acres-for-a-cent, unpromisin', deso-

late, infernal hole I ever struck, but it's a paradise alongside of that."

Three days after this they came to a river covered with ice, and they began the passage, feeling sure that there would be something on the other side.

When nearly across Dick and Ralph broke through, and went into the water up to their necks, being rescued from amid the tumbling and rocking ice-cakes by their comrades.

Before they reached the shore Topp stepped through an air-hole and pulled the doctor after him, so that by the time they reached shore they were all in a sorry plight enough.

They had no other clothes, and were obliged to stand in the keen air nearly naked, while they wrung out the water, after which they resumed their still reeking garments.

By a vigorous run they managed to keep from freezing, and just at night they beheld a welcome sight—a large mud hut—which they found to not only afford shelter and the means of making a fire, but which contained also a quantity of coarse food, left there for chance travelers.

They therefore dried their clothes, warmed themselves thoroughly, consumed a hearty meal, and then went to sleep, thinking that at last they had baffled the anger of adverse fate, and that hereafter she would not attempt to overwhelm them.

Alas! they knew not what trials were still in store for them.

CHAPTER XIX.

BURNED OUT—HERVEY'S ESCAPE.

Our friends went to sleep with not a thought of danger in their minds, no watch being set, as no one dreamed of harm.

An hour or two after midnight, when men sleep soundest, three or four dusky forms might have been seen hovering about the hut, taking care to make no noise, lest those inside should awake.

Then they tried the rude door, and, finding it only insecurely fastened, quickly pushed it open and entered.

Stealing noiselessly about among the sleeping forms, these figures picked up the weapons of the wanderers and took them away, next seeking for anything in the shape of food, and robbing them of that as well.

Then they went out as silently as before, and consulted with some one who stood aloof, wrapped in a long fur coat.

Evidently their evil work was not yet finished.

Robbery was not, then, their only motive?

No.

They clustered together for some minutes, and then a faint glimmer appeared in their midst.

This brightened, and then it was seen that they had kindled a fire on the bare ground, and were lighting torches at it.

With torches in hand, they now approached the hut, and once more entered.

Then they set fire to everything that would burn and hurried away.

The smoke and flame increased, the air became hot and stifling, and then the friends awoke.

Ralph was the first to arouse himself.

"Wake up!" he cried, shaking Dick; "the fire has spread, and we shall be burned out!"

Dick sprang to his feet and looked around him.

The door was fast, but was a mass of flames, and must be broken down before they could get out.

He looked around quickly for his rifle, with which to break open the door.

He could not find it.

Topp and the doctor were now awake, and were hurriedly looking for an ax or some other weapon of defense.

There were none to be found.

"How could the door have caught fire?" cried the doctor. "Some villain has been at work."

"Is there no way out?" cried Ralph.

"Yes, you can bet there is, for I can't tell a lie, and I'm going to make one," cried Topp.

Then, drawing his hood over his face, he put his head between his arms and rushed blindly at the burning door.

Crash!

Away it went, flat on the ground, landing Topp in the snow beyond.

Crack!

Crack!

What noise was that which now broke upon the awful stillness?

The report of rifles!

Then came the thud of bullets against the mud walls inside.

They had passed harmlessly over Topp's head, owing to his sudden fall.

They had evidently been meant for him, as another report was now heard.

"Get the guns!" whispered Dick, hurriedly, "and come out. Topp will be murdered."

But the weapons were missing, and Ralph guessed the truth.

"They have been stolen!" he said, in hurried tones.

"That villain is again at work—confound him!" muttered the doctor.

Then they heard a shout from Topp, who seemed to be engaged in a struggle with some one.

"You miserable villain!" he was heard to say. "I'll fix you for this night's work."

"To the rescue!" shouted Dick.

Then all three rushed from the burning hut.

As they reached the outside the roof fell in with a crash.

They were none too soon.

Arrived outside, they beheld Topp engaged in a struggle with one man, to whose assistance three or four others were now running.

The doctor leaped forward, and, putting out his big foot, sent one of these fellows sprawling upon the hard ground.

Ralph took another between the eyes, and made him howl in the most doleful fashion.

Dick went directly to the rescue of the cook.

At that moment the remains of the burning rubbish broke out into fresh life.

The flames lit up the faces of both Topp and his assailant.

Dick uttered a cry of surprise.

"Hervey!"

It was the man himself.

At that moment Topp had succeeded in wrenching the rifle from his hands.

Ralph, too, now came hurrying up, having obtained the rifle of the man he had knocked down.

Things began to look bad for the cruel wretch who had caused all this trouble.

He broke away from Topp, and snatched the rifle from his grasp.

"You'll hear from me again!" he cried, and then dashed away.

One of the men who had aided him suddenly leaped upon Ralph, tore the weapon from his hands, and bounded away in the darkness after the chief villain.

"It's lucky we awoke," muttered Dick, "or we would all have been burned to death."

"So Hervey has been at it again," added the doctor. "Oh, the miserable coward!—to steal our weapons and fire the hut

while we slept, too—hanging is too good for such a wretch.”

The hut had been utterly destroyed, and, therefore, afforded no shelter, but, fortunately, the night was not as cold as it had been, and they did not suffer much.

Morning came at last, dull and cheerless, a storm being evidently in preparation.

The four companions searched the ruins of the hut, but found not a scrap of food.

Everything had been taken away.

Even the pack on Topp's shoulders had been cut open and rifled, and among them all three was nothing to eat.

Bits of ice and snow, placed in their mouths, afforded them some temporary relief, but food was what they required to keep their strength.

“This is putty rough,” muttered Topp, “but I remember once, when I was out on a explorin’ tower, of being wuss off even than this.

“We was going through the great desert, takin’ observations of the moon, and we had a telescope as big as a house, and I ain’t telling ye a lie, nuther, ’cause I can’t do it, for that there telescope was the biggest ye ever seed.

“Why, sir, I remember one night in partickler, when the moon was shinin’ bright, hang me if, when I looked through it, I couldn’t see the man in the moon a winkin’, it was so clear.

“One of our fellers took a squint, and he said he could see the old man shift his quid of baccy from one cheek to t’other; but then he was an awful liar, and ye couldn’t believe nothin’ he said.

“I’ll take an affidavit on it, though, that later on, when we was a’most starved fur suthin to eat, I gave a peep through the glass, and I’ll be blowed if I wasn’t riled.

“Yes, sir, I was riled, and no wonder, for there I see, squatting right down to table, the man in the moon and all his family, takin’ tea, and stowin’ away the good things like two o’clock.

“Yes, sir. I can’t tell a lie, and I tell ye I see the old man and the old woman, and all the brother and sister moonsters, piling in the grub and smackin’ their chops, and we a-starvin’ down there in the African desert.

“I’ll take my word, it made me so mad that I up and smashed the telescope all to bits, and what do ye suppose we found in it?

“Why, some of those big thieves in the camp had stowed away three pair of roast chickens, half a dozen hams, five loaves of bread, and a bottle of rum, thinking we’d never see ’em in the telescope.

“You can just bet we piled into them provisions, for I can’t tell a lie when it comes to eatin’, and arter that, when I looked up at the moon, being filled up with good things, particularly rum, I couldn’t see a blamed thing.”

“I don’t see how you could, in the first place,” remarked Dick, with a smile, “with all those things in the telescope; but as you’re a truthful man, I suppose I’ll have to believe you. That’s easier than getting the proof, I know.”

“Well, I told ye it was a whopper.”

“What was,” interposed Ralph—“the telescope or the story?”

“Confound you, you ought to know better; thought you had more sense!” sputtered Dr. Davids. “Tell a yarn about eating—filling your stomach up with good things. Ugh! Makes me hungry to think of it. Confounded fool—why didn’t he tell of something else?”

“Friends,” said Dick, gravely, “the only thing we can do is to push ahead. We must come upon some town soon. We cannot wander forever in this cruel wilderness.”

It was clear enough that the only thing to do was to push on; but the strength of the party was well-nigh gone, and an ordinary day’s journey was an undertaking.

However, there was nothing for it but to push on, and so

the weary march was continued until nightfall, when suddenly a species of wild hare ran across their path and sought refuge among the rocks, causing all the greatest excitement.

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS AND FOES—AN OFT-INTERRUPTED JOURNEY—THE NIGHT ATTACK.

“There’s some grub, anyhow,” cried Topp, eagerly. “Oh, if we only had a gun now!”

There was not even a knife among the party, everything in the shape of weapons having been stolen from them.

However, Ralph gathered an armful of stones, and when Topp began endeavoring to dig the hare out, the young fellow stood ready to stone it at its first appearance.

Luckily the hole in which the little animal had sought refuge was not deep, and Topp soon exposed him to view.

The creature started to bolt, slipping easily through Topp’s fingers, but Ralph threw a stone and partially stunned him.

The cook made a grab at him, but he bit his captor’s hand, and Topp was glad to let go, with a howl of pain.

Ralph came in with a heavier stone, however, and laid him low, when Dick, seizing him by the heels, dashed his head against the rock, and finally settled him.

There were no means of making a fire, the tinder-boxes having been stolen, and no knives to cut the animal up with, so that they were actually obliged to tear the creature apart, take out the entrails, and eat the flesh raw.

This was better than nothing, however, and they felt their strength considerably renewed after this rude repast.

They kept on until long after dark, finally sinking to rest under an overhanging bank where there was a quantity of dry moss.

In the morning they found that some of this moss was edible, and they instantly filled up on it for want of something better, taking a quantity of it along with them, and living on it for two days.

Then they found another hut, but the destroyer had been there ahead of them, and everything had been burned, so that they were obliged to sleep on the bare ground, with the cold wind blowing through their ragged garments.

For the whole of the next day they went without food, but pushed on courageously, and with a determination which nothing could weaken.

At night they saw the lights of a little village ahead of them, and although the road was rough, and in places exceedingly dangerous, on account of numerous pitfalls at the side of the path, they did not stop until they reached the first house, which was that of the priest or ruler of the little hamlet.

This man proved to be exceedingly kind-hearted, and although he could not understand a word of their language, it needed not words to tell him of their sad condition.

He was poor himself, and his house was not much better than a hovel, but it was warm, and afforded them a shelter, and this, with the coarse food he gave them, was as much as they could wish for.

The doctor made him understand, by signs, that they had been shipwrecked, had lost all their companions, had suffered hardships, and desired to reach some settled country as soon as possible.

They remained with him a week, receiving the utmost kindness, and, although their food consisted mostly of dried fish, with just a little meal and some herbs, they felt much stronger than they had expected they would on such meager diet.

“Something is better than nothing,” said Topp, wisely, “and that’s the difference arter all. Even dried fish is better than

old bootlegs, but I don't tell a lie when I say I'd like to have a good tough beefsteak to chew on instead of this everlasting fish. I don't believe they live on anything else."

"They don't. Scurvy lot they are, too—all except our host—he's a decent fellow," declared the eccentric doctor, in his disjointed manner of speaking.

The party were furnished with whole clothes to take the place of their rags, although their boots had to be patched up, there being none of those useful articles to spare.

Then, furnished with knives and stout cudgels, they were taken in a cart to the next town, a distance of some twenty-five versts, by the young priest himself, who left his flock to look after them personally.

Here he introduced them to a magistrate, the chief person of importance in the place, and returned to his own town alone, his profession securing him from molestation at the hands of the bands of nomadic robbers that now and then infested the roads.

At the house of their new acquaintance the wanderers fared rather better than they had done at the priest's, although the welcome they received could not have exceeded that which the former worthy man had given them.

They were provided with boots, with two pistols, and ammunition enough for several rounds; were given a small but warm blanket apiece, and, for the first time in many weeks, actually tasted meat well-cooked and palatable.

In the magistrate's house they lived on meat, coarse, black bread, dried herbs and sour wine, the latter driving away the scurvy which had begun to make its appearance again, though not to any alarming extent.

After a stay of ten days, during which time they found it impossible to communicate with anyone who could have informed their government of their safety, they again continued their journey.

They could not be supplied with horses all around, there being few to spare, and therefore they were put into a wagon drawn by two horses, and, under the care of a guide and a young man to drive, set out at length for the next town of any importance.

The distance to be traveled was about fifty miles, and as they could not hope to obtain entertainment at any of the wretched collections of huts on the way, they took a supply of provisions with them, to use as necessity required.

The road was occasionally infested by bands of robbers, or of gypsies who were no better than such; but as there had been no reports lately of any depredations committed by these people, it was not considered necessary either to take a strong escort or to more than ordinarily arm themselves.

The guide carried a brace of heavy pistols, which were capable of making a considerable report, but not of doing much damage otherwise, and he also had a huge sword buckled at his side, so that, with the knives and pistols of the Americans, the party was considered unusually strong.

Dick did not think so, and he could not but feel that there was trouble brewing for them, although, if he had been asked, he could not have told from what quarter it would come.

The start was made in the early morning, and, as the road was a bad one, and could only be traveled by daylight, they could not hope to make the journey in less than three or four days.

When they had proceeded about ten miles one of the traces suddenly broke, although it had appeared perfectly strong at the start.

This occasioned a delay of an hour, as the driver had to go to a farm-house some distance away, find a harness-maker and bring him to the spot, so that after they had once more got under way, they did not make more than three miles before they were obliged to stop on account of the darkness.

Supper was prepared and eaten in the wagon, after which

the horses were staked, and the travelers disposed themselves to rest.

The next morning, after proceeding five miles, one of the horses became most unaccountably lame, and as there were no others to be procured without riding a long distance, it was considered best to go on with the remaining animal.

The guide undertook to drive, while the young man returned to the town with the disabled animal, and so the journey was continued.

One horse could not go as fast as two, and although the travelers walked most of the way, that day's record was but ten miles.

They encamped in the wagon, as before, and took an early start the next morning, but, shortly before noon, one of the forewheels got fast in a deep rut, and, in the effort to extricate it, came off, badly wrenching the axle in the operation.

The guide said that he knew of a smith some four or five versts further on, and that if they would be patient he would go ahead and bring him back.

This would use up the rest of the remaining daylight, but as there was no help for it they consented, although Dick gave it as his decided opinion that there was design in all this, and that these delays had been purposely caused.

"I'll bet that this fellow is in with the robbers," declared Ralph, "and if he does come back he will bring a gang with him."

Thinking that such might indeed be the case, the party looked to their weapons of defense, and as the time passed, kept a watch on the road ahead, so as to be prepared for a fight at the first sign of danger.

Just at nightfall, however, the guide returned with a smith, the necessary work being accomplished in about an hour, but as it was impracticable to travel at night, a halt was made until the next morning.

Nothing occurred during the night to cause the slightest alarm, and at daybreak, having previously breakfasted and made the wagon ready, off they started.

This day they managed to go fifteen miles, halting in one of the wildest spots they had ever seen.

They had met small parties of pedestrians and one or two single riders mounted on mules during the day, and these, the guide assured them, had told him that nothing was to be feared from robbers, for none had been seen for more than a month.

They, therefore, went to sleep in perfect confidence; but toward midnight Dick awoke with a strange feeling of approaching danger oppressing him.

So great was this feeling, in fact, that he awoke his friends, and then it was discovered that the guide, who generally slept in the fore part of the wagon, was missing.

Dick leaped out, and, looking around him, soon saw that not only was the guide absent, but the horse also—not a trace of either being visible.

It was further discovered that beyond the charges contained in the two pistols worn by Dick and Topp, there was no ammunition, every grain of powder and every ounce of lead having been taken, together with the pouches containing them.

"This is a plot!" cried Dick; "and that rascally guide is a party to it."

"Hark!" whispered Ralph. "I hear footsteps. They are coming! Let us stand our ground and fight till the last!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REPULSE—ARRESTED—THE CHARGE.

"Let us conceal ourselves under the wagon," suggested Dick, "and then we may perhaps gain an advantage over them."

"All four accordingly ensconced themselves under the wagon, and presently a party of four or five men, mounted on stoutly-built horses, rode up.

One of these men, evidently a leader, spoke some words in a low tone and in a strange tongue to another, who proved to be the guide himself.

Dick gave a start, for although he could not understand the stranger's words, he had recognized his voice in an instant.

"Hervey, by all that's bad!" he whispered to his comrades.

"What's that?" hissed the man suddenly in good English. "I could swear I heard my name. By Heaven, they are awake, but they shall not escape me this time!"

Then he dashed up to the rear end of the wagon, tore open the canvas flap and fired three or four times in rapid succession into the pitchy darkness.

The flashes revealed nothing to him, for he could not tell whether anybody was within or not.

He was surprised, however, that no outcry had been made.

"Bring a light here!" he shouted, forgetting his Russian in his excitement, "and let us see what has happened."

His gestures more than his words were understood, and the guide hurriedly prepared a torch and brought it to him.

"Now!" suddenly hissed Dick, as the light revealed the form of the traitor. "If I miss, shoot the villain."

Crack!

There was a sharp report and a snort of pain.

The villain's horse had suddenly shied from some unaccountable cause, and the bullet had struck it instead of the man for whom it had been intended.

"A thousand curses!" yelled Hervey, as his steed fell to his knees. "Who in thunder fired that shot?"

Crack!

Ralph fired the second shot, and was more lucky than Dick had been.

The bullet struck the villain on the cheek-bone within half an inch of the eye, glanced off, struck the bridge of the nose, and then plowed a shallow furrow across the scoundrel's forehead, and whizzed off among the stunted trees.

It had been a narrow escape for the villain, and, as it was, he fancied for the time that he was more seriously hurt than he had been.

"Give 'em a charge!" cried Topp. "It's our only chance!"

All four suddenly dashed out from under the wagon, and, knives in hand, made a fierce assault on the first objects that presented themselves.

The guide dropped his torch as the impulsive doctor drove a knife into his side, and the place was in darkness.

Ralph stuck a horse in the flank, and sent it galloping off madly, throwing its rider against a rock and breaking his neck.

Dick made a savage cut at a man, but merely succeeded in wounding his arm; the fellow taking fright and dashing away at the first sound of alarm.

Topp unseated one of the robbers, but was unable to secure his horse; and the man himself took to his heels, thinking that a whole army of travelers had suddenly sprung up from the ground.

Hervey, blinded with blood and smarting with pain, fell across his horse's neck; the animal, though badly wounded, plunging off through the trees, and bearing its rider away in safety.

The whole party of robbers had been stampeded, and our friends congratulated themselves on the unexpected result of the attack, and anxiously awaited the dawn.

When it was light enough to see, a reconnoissance was made, when it was discovered that three men and two horses had been killed—the men being thrown, the horses falling.

Hervey's horse was recognized by its wound, Topp also knowing it again from having had a good look at it the night

before; but although the animal was dead, nothing was to be seen of its former rider.

The animal had gone some little distance before he had stumbled, and very likely Hervey had managed to evade being thrown, and had joined his friends.

"I'm sorry I didn't kill him, for your sake, Dick," remarked Ralph. "The man is a villain and a murderer, and should be shot at sight. If he isn't dead, he will make trouble for us yet."

The wagon still remained, but as it was of no use to them without horses, it would, of course, have to be abandoned.

"Since they have left us the wagon, and also since its owners have endeavored to betray us," remarked Dick, "we need have no compunction in taking what we want from it."

The cover and frame were taken to furnish them a tent, the blankets and robes served as bedding, and the provisions and other supplies would be useful to them, so that when they had made up into bundles what they wanted, the wagon had been literally stripped.

"If we'd only come across one o' them horses when we was on the retreat from the Hope," observed Topp, "wouldn't it have been a feast?"

"I can't tell a lie," answered Ralph, with a grin, "for it would have been one indeed."

Leaving the despoiled wagon behind them, they now set off on foot, trusting to chance to find the road, and making the most of their time, lest the robbers should return and take vengeance upon them for their rout of the night before.

At night they encamped in a little wood or collection of dwarf pines and oaks, and with the materials at hand constructed a very comfortable shelter, and enjoyed a hearty supper and an excellent night's rest.

The next day they struck upon one of the government post-roads, as they knew by the tall posts painted in black and white, and surmounted by a sort of finger-board pointing the way ahead.

After this they felt safer, for now they were not obliged to camp out at night, but rested in the different post-houses on the way, and were treated with the greatest respect.

At last they entered the town to which their false guide had agreed to accompany them, finding it quite a large place.

To their surprise, however, the moment they set foot in the town they were seized by a party of men who seemed to be policemen, or officers of some sort, and, accompanied by a howling crowd of women and children, taken to a strong-looking building, where they were confronted by a judicial-looking personage in a rusty uniform, who sat behind a desk littered with papers.

This man put numerous questions which they could not understand, not knowing the language, and they therefore remained silent.

This was taken for contempt of court, or a sign of hardened guilt, and with an angry gesture the man ordered them away, the soldiers conducting them to a large cell most securely guarded, into which they were thrown and left to themselves.

"What's the meaning of all this—take us for conspirators—because we won't answer them? Who could, when they don't speak English? This is as bad as tramping through the wilderness, feeding on old boots."

"Never mind, doctor," said Topp, in a tone meant to be assuring. "If they keep us here prisoners, they're bound to feed us, even if they do send us to the quicksilver mines afterward."

"But what have we done?" put in Ralph. "How could we conspire against their old government when we don't know a word of their language? That's what they send men to the mines for."

"There is some misunderstanding somewhere," answered Dick, "and if we could find someone here that speaks English

we might settle it in a moment, but these brutes evidently think we're shamming."

It was night before anyone visited them, when their meals were brought them by a soldier, to whom they addressed a few words of inquiry.

The man stared, shook his head, and went out, presently returning with a man who addressed them in two or three different European languages.

They shook their heads, and presently he addressed them in French, the sound of which was familiar to the doctor, although he knew but one or two words.

"Français?" he asked.

"Oui, messieurs."

"We are Americans then, and friends of the French. Comprenez, Américains?"

"Oui, oui, oui," returned the man volubly, and then he and the soldier went out, leaving the prisoners to eat their meal alone, and to wait patiently for his coming.

They fell asleep long before this, for it was well into the next forenoon before the guard returned, bringing with him a gentlemanly-looking man dressed in a sort of half uniform.

"Gentlemen," said he, "there appears to be some mistake here, since you claim to be Americans. What can I do for you?"

"Why are we detained here?" asked Dick.

"You are charged with a serious crime."

"And that is——"

"Highway robbery and murder, and it is said that you belong to a band that has long committed the greatest depredations upon our unfrequented roads."

This charge completely staggered the prisoners, and for a few moments they seemed unable to speak.

CHAPTER XXII.

EXPLANATIONS—THE PRISON DOORS ARE OPENED.

The statement of the charge against the prisoners had a most bewildering effect upon them, as we have said.

Dick was the first to speak.

"It is false!" he cried, indignantly. "We were ourselves attacked by robbers, but fortunately made them retire."

"The guide was in the plot, and we took what we wanted out of the wagon," added Ralph. "I suppose that is the evidence against us."

"That is a part of it," answered the gentleman.

"Sir," said Dick, "if I mistake not you are an American. We are the survivors of an Arctic exploring expedition, which left San Francisco, in the United States, over two years ago, in the steamer Hope, my father's vessel."

"What? Were you on Captain Hudson's vessel?"

"I am his son Richard; this gentleman is Dr. Davids, ship's surgeon; this is Topp, the cook, and this young man is Ralph Sargent, my most intimate friend."

"Really," cried the gentleman, taking a seat at the rude table the cell afforded, "you interest me greatly. Sit down and tell me your history. You say you are the only survivors of the expedition?"

"There was another, and I presume that he still lives, and that our being here is a part of his vengeance."

"Vengeance?"

"Yes; but it is a long story, and would weary you. The man's name is Jack Murden, but he has called himself Hervey lately. Since the retreat from the vessel, he has made many attempts on my life, and I believe that this is only a part of his schemes."

Dick then gave a brief outline of Hervey's past history, of

the voyage of the Hope, of her numerous misfortunes, and her final end, and of the terrible retreat and march through the wilderness, the loss of their comrades, the confession of Hervey, and of this last affair with the robbers, and the subsequent arrest.

"What you tell me is really surprising," remarked the gentleman, when Dick had concluded. "That is the first news we have heard from the Hope, for you must know that considerable speculation has been rife concerning the fate of the expedition, both here and in America."

"Then our effort has attracted attention?"

"Indeed it has, and, although I am deeply pained at your failure, I will do all I can to forward you to your own country, as I presume you have no particular desire to remain in Europe?"

"None whatever, under the circumstances; but how about the charges against us?"

"Oh, as for that," returned the other, smiling, "I will see that you are released. Being Americans, it does not stand to reason that you would come away off here to become robbers, particularly as you do not know a word of the language."

"Do you know who furnished the information that caused us to be arrested?"

"I really do not, but if you will remain here a short while, I will procure an order for your release, and also obtain what information I can."

The stranger turned to go, when Dick said, pleasantly:

"We are not yet aware, sir, to whom we owe this intervention in our behalf."

"Oh, to be sure! really, I had forgotten that. I might say that you owe it to the fact of your being Americans, for I am but an humble instrument. My name is Fisher, and I am an attache of the American Legation in Russia, quartered in this town to look after the interests of chance Americans who may pass through."

Mr. Fisher then took his leave, and our friends began discussing the situation among themselves.

"I would really like to know to whom we are indebted for being in jail," muttered Dick.

"Hervey had a hand in it, I'll bet considerable," interposed Ralph.

"I'd like to get a chance to wring his neck," sputtered the doctor. "There's only one thing that would give me more satisfaction, and that is, being back in my own country again. No more North Poles for me. Poor Harry! I wish he hadn't convinced me that the thing was feasible, for then we would never have gone looking for what'll never be found."

"We made a fair start," returned Dick, "but something, we don't know what, went against us, and ruined our calculations. Even Bolton was puzzled."

"I'll bet, then, that Hervey had something to do with it," put in Ralph; "though, of course, I don't know what. But he seems to have been our evil genius all along."

"Talking of bein' in prison," observed Topp, his observation being all the more remarkable considering that no one had said anything about prisons for at least five minutes; "I was in prison once when we had a darn sight wuss time than we do here, 'cause I was seventeen years in it, and they was the wust seventeen months I ever see."

"Oh, come, now; you said years first," interrupted Ralph.

"No, sir, months; I can't tell a lie, and it was months; but, then, each month seemed a year, 'cause the time dragged so heavy. The walls were fifty foot thick, and, consequently, what light reached us through the windows got so used up before it could get to us that we couldn't see it. There was a dozen of us in that den, which wasn't more than ten feet square; so you can imagine how much room there was; but, then, we was warm, and that was something, for it was cold outside, and the snow drifted in through the windows——"

"With the walls fifty feet thick?" asked Ralph. "Didn't some of it stop on the way?"

"Well, if you know this story better than I—who was right there, and can't tell a lie to save my neck—why, go ahead and tell it, that's all I've got to say. Some fellows wouldn't believe the angel Gabe, much less me, that can't tell a lie."

"No, you can't, that's a fact," laughed Ralph, "for a lie deceives, but there's no chance of anybody ever being deceived by your yarns. They are laid on like the walls in this last one—too thick."

Soon after this Mr. Fisher informed our friends that they were free, and invited them to make their home with him until they were ready to continue their journey.

"The charge against you was made by a rough-looking man with a black beard and mustache," he said, "who spoke Russian fluently enough, but who, nevertheless, seemed a foreigner."

"Did he give his name?" asked Dick, becoming interested.

"No; and he has disappeared. He had been wounded in the forehead——"

"Then it's Hervey!" cried Topp, "for a bullet hit him in the cheek and glanced off, hitting his forehead. It's the same villainous cuss, for all the world."

"No wonder he has gone," added Ralph. "It isn't likely he would stay to prove his charges, and that would be necessary, of course."

"Not here, it wouldn't," returned their friend, with a smile. "Justice is dealt out in the most summary manner here, and often a mere accusation by an unknown party is enough to condemn an innocent man to death, or even worse."

"Then the sooner we get out of such a country the better," sputtered the doctor. "Justice, indeed—injustice I should call it! No wonder these people keep their rulers in constant fear of their lives—afraid of being blown up or poisoned or shot—or all combined."

"It was very fortunate for you," continued Mr. Fisher, "that you happened to meet a Frenchman, and told him that you were Americans. Otherwise I might have never heard of you, and your death-warrant would have been signed by some careless official who was not the least interested in your case, and would not have given it another thought."

"Then I say, with the doctor," exclaimed Dick, "that the sooner we get out of the country the better."

This sentiment was echoed by all, and then, accompanied by their friend, they left the place which might have been their grave but for his timely interference.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE TROUBLE—HERVEY'S REAPPEARANCE AND ESCAPE—DICK'S DETERMINATION.

Our friends remained with Mr. Fisher three days, and were then forwarded upon their way, being provided with passports which would insure them perfect safety from any such mistakes as the one which had liked to prove so fatal to them.

They were supplied with money and letters to prominent bankers on the route, which would secure them more when that gave out, as well as letters to officials by means of which they could get all the assistance necessary to take them from place to place until they reached the coast.

Armed with these documents, they had no trouble in obtaining post-horses, seats in mail-carriages and places on railway trains, and at last reached the Russian capital after a long but uneventful journey.

Here they communicated with their government, finding, much to their surprise, however, that they had been reported

dead, and that it had been given out that a party of imposters had conceived the idea of getting home to America by falsely stating themselves to be the survivors of the Hope.

They applied to the American consul, but even the letters from Mr. Fisher did not avail them, and they found themselves looked upon with distrust and suspicion.

In fact, it was a difficult matter for them to prove their identity, the logs and records of the Hope having been lost, and there being nothing in their possession which could associate them with that ill-starred vessel.

"To what villain do we owe this new mischance?" asked Dick, in despair.

"I should think it was plain enough," retorted Dr. Davids. "Hervey is still at work. I suppose we will have to unwind a deal of red tape before we can fix things up; but it's got to be done. We can't live under suspicion all our lives."

"H'm, we don't intend always to live in Russia," muttered Ralph.

"No," interrupted Dick, quickly; "but I'm afraid we will find it somewhat difficult to get out of it, as long as we are regarded as impostors."

"Just let me meet the scoundrel—that is all!" growled Topp. "I can't tell a lie, by gum! if I catch that villain I'll strangle him, as sure as I live!"

Finding that they could do nothing with the American consul, our little party determined to wait until they could write to Mr. Fisher and get his testimony in their behalf.

They therefore put up at a quiet hotel where there was a waiter who understood English passably well, determined to bide their time until this vexatious matter should be satisfactorily settled.

They were almost sure that they were being constantly followed by spies, for what purpose they could not guess unless it was to discover whether they were really impostors or not, and this made Dick and Ralph very angry, and they determined to speak to the English consul about it, seeing that the representative of their own country was so lukewarm in their behalf.

"If the government would only put decent men into such places," growled the doctor, "instead of played-out politicians whom it wants to get rid of, our interests would be looked after much better. The idea of refusing to believe anyone almost, and taking the word of such a villain as that Hervey!"

We may say, in passing, that the abuse the doctor complained of has since been reformed, and also that they had not seen the chief consul at all, but his deputy, the principal being a different sort of man.

Dick and Ralph had gone out to see the British consul, and, not having returned when night fell, Topp thought he would go out for a stroll to see the sights.

He was standing on the bridge across the Neva, when he suddenly saw, by the light of a gas-lamp, a figure approaching, the identity of which he instantly recognized, despite the darkness.

Hurrying forward, he seized the man by the throat, threw aside the heavy cloak he wore, and swinging him around to the light, cried fiercely:

"So it's you, is it, Mr. Jack Murden, alias Hervey? Weren't you satisfied with trying to kill us all, but you must now ruin our reputations?"

"Let me go," hissed the villain, for it was Hervey indeed. "I have nothing against you. It is only that cub of a boy I wish to be avenged upon. His father knocked me down, left a scar on my cheek that I shall never get rid of, had me flogged, and roused the devil in me that he never could quiet after that."

"I'll be hanged if I won't, then."

"I've nothing against you, but I hated him—hate his son. It was I that turned the vessel from her course, and made her get fast in the ice; I that shut him up in his cabin to go down

with the vessel; I that killed Bolton; I that have followed on the brat's track; I that will kill him; yes, and you, too, if you interfere with me. Take your hand off my throat!"

A crowd had begun to collect, attracted by the sound of loud and angry voices, and by the menacing gestures of the two men, and among them Topp recognized several agents of the police and one of the spies that he had formerly noticed following him.

"So I will," he said, quickly; "but I'll give you suthin' to remember me by, all the same."

Then suddenly lifting the man off his feet, by a strong effort—he was standing close to the parapet—he flung him over into the icy waters beneath.

"That man is a Nihilist!" he cried, suddenly, as the police rushed upon him with drawn swords.

Though they understood not the remainder of his speech, that one word was plain to all, and the greatest excitement prevailed.

Three or four suspicious-looking fellows in the crowd immediately made off, and while two officers took charge of Topp others went below the bridge to secure the body of the villain when it should come to the surface.

When Topp had raised the man in his arms to fling him over the parapet, the long cloak which Hervey had worn was stripped from his shoulders and had fallen on the stones.

The police agents had seen this, and had picked it up at once, being now occupied in searching it thoroughly.

Ripping open the lining, they found, among other papers, certain incendiary documents inspiring the reader with hatred of the government, and counseling the immediate murder of the czar.

There were, besides, a list of prominent Nihilists, with their residences, and the rough draft of some denunciatory resolutions evidently intended to be read at some future meeting, several invitations to which were also found in sealed envelopes directed to certain addresses.

This was an important seizure, but it was more important that the rascal in whose possession these things had been should be captured before he could give the alarm.

Lights flashed along the river, signals were given and answered, and in a few moments police boats were plying up and down patrolling the banks, so that the man should not escape.

He had not been found nor seen to rise, and yet it seemed hardly probable that he had been drowned, nor that he had concealed himself anywhere under the piers of the bridge.

Topp was conducted to the chief of police, where soon afterward his friend, the doctor, came to look for him, the two boys having returned.

The American consul himself had been seen, and offered to interest himself in their behalf, expressing himself as very sorry that there had been any misunderstanding in the matter at all.

Hervey was not found that night, but several important arrests had been made; and in consideration of this fact Topp was released, and a safe guaranty given him and his friends to go and come where they chose.

In the course of a week tidings came from Mr. Fisher, who gave our friends the very best recommendations in the world, and expressed it as his opinion that they had been made the victims of a base plot.

As no further charges were made against them in that direction, it was very evident that Hervey had been at the bottom of the first, and now feared to make any attempt at substantiating his false statements, even were he alive.

Our friends, glad to get away from a country where they had met with so many trials and hardships, now took their way out of it as speedily as possible, made their way to the coast, crossed over into Germany, took ship from Hamburg to

London, and, arriving at the latter place, wrote and cabled home, the confirmation of the news of their safety being received on this side of the ocean with the greatest demonstrations of joy.

"Now, for home!" cried Dick, "and then to make another effort to find that which so far seems beyond our reach!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

JUSTICE OVERTAKES THE EVIL-DOER—CONCLUSION.

In London our party of returned explorers met with every kindness, and were feted and praised to their hearts' content. At last they began to think of going home, and therefore secured berths aboard a steamer bound for New York, going to Liverpool a day in advance of that set for the sailing of the steamer in order to look about them.

At last they took their departure, gliding down the Mersey and down the Irish channel, stopping at Queenstown to take on the last of the passengers and the mails, and then out upon the broad ocean toward the land of their birth.

"Over there," muttered Topp, pointing out to sea, after they had lost sight of land, "is America, and anyone what ain't satisfied with that ought to be scalped. At any rate, it's good enough for me, and the next time I go to sea, no matter where, just let me know it."

"I've had all I want of North Poles, and Siberian wilds, and Russian justice and starvation," echoed the doctor, testily. "I lost the best friend I had up yonder in those infernally cold regions, and you don't get me up there again, I promise you that. No, sir! I am going to settle down."

"Won't you go with me if I ever command a vessel bound for the North Pole?" asked Dick.

"No, my boy, I won't. Not even my affection for you would tempt me to—at least I don't think—. Oh, well! don't say anything more about it, boy, until you do get a ship."

"You certainly are not thinking already of taking another trip of that sort, are you, Dick?" asked Ralph, earnestly. "One would think you had had enough of it."

"I shall go in the very next expedition that sets out, old fellow, and you are going with me."

"Excuse me. No icebergs and Polar bears in mine, if you please; and if you're a sensible fellow, you'll confine your explorations to warmer climates. I can make just as good a sailor by going to regular places of traffic, and even better, than by freezing myself in the North."

"Well, my boy, you can do as you please, of course, but as far as I am concerned, I shall keep on trying to reach the North Pole until I succeed at last, or leave my bones in the icy North a sacrifice to my ambition, as my poor father has done."

"Then I'll be hanged if I don't see you through," cried Ralph, shaking Dick's hand warmly. "You and I have always been chums, old boy, and I'm not going to desert you now, no matter where you go!"

As the two boys exchanged a warm grip, the eccentric doctor rubbed his eyes, turned away and muttered to himself:

"There's a couple of warm-hearted, good-natured, affectionate, brave, fearless young fools, but hang me if they won't make me go with 'em if I don't look out for myself."

"Well, well. You can rely on it as the truth, that you don't catch me going up North again," muttered Topp, as he walked forward; "and yet the only thing I do regret is that I didn't collar that confounded sharp of a Jack Hervey when I had a good chance, and choke the nonsense out of him!"

By the way, our readers will no doubt be wondering what has become of Hervey, and asking whether, after all, he had escaped the vengeance which had so long pursued him, apparently in vain.

We will state, then, at once, that the man was still alive, having adroitly escaped from the Russian police spies, and made his way out of that inhospitable country.

By pretending to be heart and soul with the Nihilists, and assisting them to get rid of one or two unimportant government officials, he had obtained their confidence, and had succeeded in getting a considerable sum of money as well.

It had all along been his intention to betray them to the police, and obtain more money thereby as a reward, but the sudden accusation of Topp, made only for the sake of stopping the man, and not because he really thought it to be true, had considerably altered his plans.

The finding of his cloak would be strong evidence against him, and now he felt that he was in danger from both enemies and friends.

He had quickly made his way under the bridge to a secret passage, opening close to one of the piers and leading through a sewer to the house of a prominent Nihilist, where he had secured a disguise and at once decamped.

He traveled day and night without stopping until he had crossed the German frontier, and then made his way into France more leisurely.

At last he found himself in England, but, having indulged in excesses of all kinds, was without a penny, and was forced to look about him.

Having no doubt but that Dick and his friends had been unable to leave St. Petersburg on account of the evil reports he had circulated concerning them, he had no fear of meeting them, and considered that the best thing he could do was to return to America, change his name again, and live secure from punishment for his crimes.

He could go as a sailor, and he was in Liverpool one day, looking for a ship, when he chanced to see Topp coming out of an ale-house.

He determined, therefore, to get away as quickly as possible, and, having procured a few shillings by working on the docks, bought some food, and contrived to stow himself away in the hold of a steamer about to sail for the United States.

Unknown to him, however, he had gone aboard the identical steamer on which our friends had taken passage, and yet there were three or four others sailing at about the same time which he might have chosen.

He knew not that fate had ordained this, knew not that the justice which he had so long defied was at last to be meted out to him.

And yet so it was, and the villain's evil career was fast drawing to a close.

He knew how long it would take the ship to clear the land, and, therefore, when his provisions had all been exhausted, he showed himself, trusting to the generosity of the captain to be allowed to work his passage to America.

The instant he had been discovered an officer had been informed, and the latter at once went forward to question the stowaway, put him to work if he was willing, and lock him up on a bread and water diet if he refused duty.

It so happened that, when Topp went forward after leaving his companions, he saw a crowd collected around one of the officers, and, being curious to know what was going on, pushed his way through the crowd, regardless of the toes he stepped upon or the elbows he jostled.

Reaching the centre of the little assembly, he uttered a sudden cry of astonishment.

There, not ten feet from him, answering the officer's questions, was the man who had escaped him in St. Petersburg, and whom he had come to regard as dead.

"Jack Hervey himself!"

As he uttered these words, which the stowaway heard, he sprang forward and seized the man by the throat.

Hervey turned pale, and attempted to shake off his assailant.

"This man is an escaped murderer!—a deserter, too!" cried Topp, excitedly. "So, so, Master Hervey, you thought you had fixed us, did you? Well, I ain't telling no lies, and it's you that'll be fixed now."

"Let go of me!" cried the man, struggling fiercely, and trying to draw a sheath-knife, which he wore in the leather belt around his waist.

"Do you know this man, Mr. Topp?" asked the officer, seizing Hervey's arm.

"I do. He was boatswain on the Hope, exploring steamer, the same as all our party was on."

At this moment the two boys, attracted by the commotion, came up.

"He killed the captain and the ice pilot," continued Topp excitedly, "and, on the retreat, tried to do away with Master Dick a dozen times. He has confessed his crimes more'n once, and gloried in 'em."

"Hervey!" cried both Dick and Ralph in a breath.

"Yes!" hissed the man, still struggling, "I have been cheated of my revenge, but at least you shall not have the satisfaction of seeing me brought to justice, as you call it."

Then, by a sudden violent effort, he suddenly wrenched himself free from those who held him, drew his knife, and, with a fierce laugh, plunged it again and again into his breast, and fell with a heavy sound on the deck.

He had been chosen by fate as the instrument of his own punishment, and had added self-murder to his many crimes.

He had died as he had lived, hardened and unrepentant, and no one regretted his end.

When the sailors lifted him up he was quite dead, having died immediately upon falling to the deck.

The body was buried in the sea, without honors, the facts in the case being entered upon the log, the ship continuing her voyage as though nothing had happened.

In course of time our party reached home, and Dick and Ralph rejoined their friends.

Topp adhered to his resolution not to go to sea again, and became a cook in a restaurant, where he remains to this day, and is as truthful as when our readers knew him.

Dr. Davids resumed the practice of medicine, and Dick has not yet tempted him to break his promise, for the reason that our hero has not, as yet, come into command of a vessel of his own.

Both he and Ralph have made one or two trips to the Arctic since their return from the Hope expedition, and although the North Pole has not yet been discovered, both boys are still alive and well.

Let us trust that they will long remain so, and that never again will they be called upon to endure such hardships and go through such dangers as menaced them during those memorable two years IN THE ICE.

THE END.

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